

THE MURDER OF
MONSIEUR FUALDÈS

FAMOUS FRENCH MYSTERIES

THE MURDER OF. MONSIEUR FUALDÈS

by
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INTRODUCTION

By M. MARCEL PRÉVOST

WHAT will be the subject of the novel of the future ? Ever since the Great War came to an end this question has been addressed continually by the leading French journalists to all the specialists on the subject and also to some people whose competence to reply is somewhat doubtful. In any case such a question can scarcely be answered with mathematical accuracy, since there is no direct connection between the cessation of hostilities and the inspiration of men of letters. The novelists of riper years, whose age precluded them from joining the army, continued their output with the mechanical regularity of official reports. But with the younger men it was different—their work was stopped, they had to lead a new existence in the camp and on the field of battle. Phases of life hitherto unimagined by them became revealed—they learned to know their fellow-citizens, both workmen and peasants. The horrors of battle and deeds of heroism filled their minds, and the experiences of their new life so far outstripped those of the years before the war that when they sat down again at their desks to write, the immensity of it all overflowed, as it were, the confines of their paper and they grew confused. It was no longer possible for them to write anything which did not take the war into account, and yet at the same time

they could not write about the war while it was still so new and overwhelming.

Nevertheless, there appeared in France a few fine novels and some stirring tales of the war, although to be quite candid there were very few of either. Then, at first gradually, but soon in greater numbers, appeared novels on the subjects to which one had turned for inspiration before the war and were read at that time with zest—realistic books whose source was Balzac, and psychological novels whose authors had read and admired Stendhal.

In brief, we returned again to the ordinary, pleasant, readable French novel, against which the only objection that could be raised was that the line taken by the development of the action and plot could generally be foreseen, and therefore a certain amount of monotony in them was the inevitable result. But, even before 1914, there had developed a taste for a more romantic and stirring novel, one full of events and not containing minute and laboured descriptions of places, manners, or people. A fair number of such books had appeared, but they were of no special value and did not create any particular sensation. From the other side of the Channel we acquired a new Gaboriau, certainly rather more limited in scope but seasoned with humour—I refer to Conan Doyle. Immediately there sprang up a host of writers of detective stories, who sought to show that the whole art of the novel consisted in endless duels between criminals and detectives. Just before and also during the war these stories increased in number, largely under the stimulus given by the development of the cinema industry and in collaboration with it. As a result of this we had a number of quite amusing

and well contrived cinema plays, but so far as my recollection serves me, no good novel appeared. This is hardly surprising if the construction of the cinema romance be considered: the author is obliged to follow the scenario (generally written by another hand) and the whole plot and the characters themselves are subordinate to its requirements. So that the result obtained is the by-product of a manufacturing process which is by itself of far greater commercial value. Most of the daily papers fill up an odd page or two with an instalment of one of these machine-made novels, and if once in a while they print something of more sterling merit—a novel of psychology and human interest—they consider that they have made a material sacrifice at the shrine of literature.

Now it must be admitted that this somewhat lurid kind of novel produces two dangerous results. In the first place, the reading public can be interested only in a tale that shows the heroine escaping from a submarine and climbing into an aeroplane, then falling into the sea and into the clutches of an octopus, from whose tentacles she escapes by clinging to the propeller of a steamer, and so forth. Pandering to such tastes is undoubtedly prejudicial to a literary romance. In the second place, and this is also a danger, certain writers of to-day, sickened by this mass of improbability, fall into the opposite extreme. They forget that even Balzac himself created the characters of Ferragus and Vautrin, and that he admired Eugène Sue, and so they tend to strip their books of any element of surprise, any coincidence, which nevertheless does occur in everyday life. You would imagine from the lack of humour in their writing that they are afraid of trying to be diverting—they are so

determinedly pedantic and austere that a gloom is cast upon work which is yet far from being devoid of merit. Some years ago, having been appointed literary adviser to a review, I had to read a good many manuscripts of novels, and I am really sorry to confess that, although a number of them reveal a cultivated mind, a first-hand knowledge of affairs and verbal skill, several are spoilt by an unpardonable fault—they are monotonous and boring.

Now, if you pass in review a list of the great French romances, starting with the *Princesse de Clèves* and ending with *Mon Frère Yves*, you will not find a single one amongst them that could be termed boring. Were Voltaire, Balzac, Sand, Flaubert, Zola or Daudet ever boring? Even the great classical French romances cannot be stigmatised as such, though the same can hardly be said of the foreign ones—*Clarissa Harlowe*, for instance, is a fine novel but very monotonous. Even if one considers the purely psychological novels of France, those for instance of Stendhal, Bourget and Boylesve, they are removed from the reproach of monotony by qualities essentially French, a graceful style, a ready wit, and ingenuity of construction.

There was distinct risk that, with the cinema novel on the one hand and the austere type devoid of any stirring incidents on the other, our own fine tradition of writing witty and readable novels was bound to decay. Happily, this has not been the case, and, even during the war, writers of outstanding merit have arisen—I will mention here only three, Duhamel, Dorgelès, and Benoît. These three men, who have only become known since 1914, are of very different temperaments, but they all possess the true spirit of romance. Like Balzac

and Stendhal,* they make use of the charm of the "unknown," which adds a savour to life itself, and makes us live for to-morrow rather than to-day, so it would be a grave psychological blunder to omit it. Even Georges Duhamel, that ardent writer and philosopher, and the author of a purely philosophical essay, does not make this mistake; on the contrary, his last novel, *Confession de minuit*, contains a remarkable example of the development of the unforeseen. Dorgelès has recently written a novel as attractive and yet as clearly analytical as his well-known *Croix de Bois*. And as for Pierre Benoît, who from the very outset of his career gained an immense number of readers for his purely romantic novels, in which psychological explanation is reduced to a minimum, he has set out his own doctrine in these few characteristic lines from his *Lac Salé*:—

"What purpose does it serve to dissect the mystery of a soul, to draw it apart and take out every spring? It is like taking to pieces and spreading out for inspection every separate part of a gun modelled in 1886 and improved on in 1893. Is it not better to try to show the results produced by the gun *before* it is dismantled—in short, to dispense with all this superfluity of analysis and find out where the shot goes?"

To sum up—if I were again asked the question, "What will the novel of the future be?"—I would reply unhesitatingly:

Contemporary French romance (I mean the romance which is literature) seems to pursue two divergent courses. In the one the actual tale will become more and more important as the author recounts actual events or the development of individual character. Examples of this are *Splendeur*.

et *Misère des Courtisanes* or *Le Disciple*. The other course will attract novelists who are not swayed by imagination, but whose prevailing characteristics are a love of the picturesque, psychological insight and preciousness of language. This latter class is filled with contempt for the so-called novel; it seems to them that every possible combination of events has already been exhausted, and so they consider the tale merely as canvas on which to embroider their pattern, and the less the threads show the better do they consider their work to be.

I think, however, that the first kind of novel will have more talented exponents than the second, for nowadays people have less time to devote to reading. To most people their novels are a recreation and, if they really wish to do any serious reading, they prefer a treatise on particular subjects to a didactic novel. The novel-reading public will ask more and more for an enthralling story of the type that is enjoyed by readers of *Gil Blas*, *Candide*, *Les Misérables*, *Cousine Bette*, *Mauprat*, or *Le Nabab*. During the last fifty years we have had novels of every conceivable kind, but nowadays we ask for them once more purely as a relaxation.

Besides these there will be a certain number of philosophical essays, meditations, or prose poems, which will have something of the form of a novel whilst striving to have as little of its true character as is possible.

That is the answer I should give to-day to the question which has been put to us in so many of the newspapers and magazines.

As a result of the revival of the romance, we shall probably have a renaissance of the historical novel. It is noteworthy that the periods which produced

the realistic and the psychological novel should have given birth to so few historical tales. The reason, however, is not difficult to find; although very different in construction the first two have this in common, that their authors work from direct observation, interpret what they see, and have to draw but little on their imagination. Now, the historical novel needs a very active imagination to visualise people and events which are not before us, and, since the trend of the novel of to-day is to give play to imagination, it is not unreasonable to expect an output of historical romance. But the historical novel of the future will, I imagine, have nothing in common with the elder Dumas or Paul Féval, since an educated reader will take no pleasure in that somewhat superficial kind of history. The great modern historical works are so careful and accurate that they enable us to dispense with the gossip and artificial atmosphere of the novel. Even the local colour in certain standard romances, such as *Cinq-Mars* and *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*, annoys or merely amuses the reader of to-day.

So what we expect in a modern historical romance is a strict attention to historical accuracy; a combination of the methods of our modern historians with the quasi-scientific ones of the realistic and psychological novelists of the nineteenth century. We shall witness a new formula of historical romance, and its leading characteristics will be a narration of facts, as historically exact and in as fresh a form as that of an historical work; an exact representation of the manners, customs, facts, and persons of the period, and entire exclusion of the artificial and the theatrical—in fact, the exact words of a reliable witness of the events. There will be no

need of invention ; the author's imagination will be sufficiently occupied in calling up and reconstructing the past so vividly that it will seem to be the present. There are very few of such historical romances to be found in the past century. Balzac alone stands out, and in his *Comédie humaine* he has sketched in parts scenes of the Restoration and of the time of Louis-Philippe on which no historian could improve.

In more recent years there have been other instances, among the most successful being the *Tragédie de Ravallac* by the two Tharauds. I strongly recommend this book to any one who does not already know it. It would well serve as a model to any one who embarks on this kind of work, and it is by no means an easy task. The writer needs the patience of the historian to examine documents and extract their pith, and he needs also the finest qualities of the novelist to bring to life the epoch, the people and their surroundings. He must make a successful choice of subject, and, just because he has so wide a field, the choice is by no means easy.

In the manuscript which M. Armand Praviel sent me recently I found most of these requirements realised. Its subject was the *Fualdès Case*, a topic on which a great deal has been written : see the bibliography appended to the work of M. Combes de Patris, published by Emile Paul, in July, 1914. Much has been written and a great deal more still remains to be said about the Fualdès mystery.

J. J. Weiss made the remark which shocked a good many people : " They can say what they like, it was a wonderful crime ! " The critic of the *Débats* wrote, " Just as in *Pro Cluentio* there lies before you, two thousand years after the event,

the living representation of the semi-barbaric town of Samnium exactly as it was in 80 B.C. in the time of Sulla, so in this book there stands out in palpitating reality an obscure provincial town of the year 1817."

From the opening pages of M. Armand Praviel's book, I felt myself transported by the magic of his story to another time and place. Nothing is lacking to make the illusion complete—neither the strange distant town at the time of unrest when the White Terror was still to be feared; nor the clash of three parties—ultra-royalists, Bonapartists furious at their overthrow, and unrepentant Jacobins; nor the unrestrained passions of politics and love.

A true and vivid narration of even a trivial lawsuit, given the particular time and place, could not fail to be of interest, but how much more so when the case is a criminal drama of the strangest and most mysterious kind, a case which is a most notorious example of man's injustice, cowardice, blindness, and prejudice. No author, however gifted, and imaginative, could possibly have conceived a crime so unheard-of, with such unexpected developments and with such remarkable characters involved, and yet it is all historically true. Moreover, so much time has elapsed since the crime took place, that no document relating to it can possibly have remained undiscovered, no person involved in it but has said his last word, and the violent political passions to which it gave rise can no longer affect our judgment in any way. If an historian has thoroughly investigated all documentary evidence with perfect impartiality, what work of imagination could really be compared to a romance of reality, provided, of course, that the historian has the essential gifts of the novelist,

and by this I mean that his imagination must be so vivid that he can endow with life his people and places; in short, that his imagination must be realistic.

The reading public will find all these qualities, as I did, in the work of M. Armand Praviel. As a proof of the enthralling interest of this book, I may add that when I am thinking of publishing a book in my *Revue* I have it read aloud to me, and no manuscript that is uninteresting can stand such a test. Not only was I not bored by the reading aloud of the *Murder of M. Fualdès*, but I went on listening to it till late in the evening and was more carried away by it than by any work of fiction. Whether it was that the judicial drama is so entrancing or the writer's gifts have enhanced it, I leave to its readers to judge. In any case they must acknowledge that the presentation is worthy of the subject.

In a periodical like the *Revue de France* we do not publish a work simply because it is new, but every attempt at something new is considered and encouraged as it deserves. To my mind the *Fualdès* of M. Praviel is a characteristic and successful attempt at the historical novel of the present and the future; the documentary evidence is exhaustive and complete, the local knowledge is exact, and imagination has been drawn upon only in order to bring vividly before us the scene of the drama, to construct an intelligible and coherent story and convince us of its reality.

I may add that from this gloomy drama the author has had the courage to draw his own conclusions—those of humanity and common sense—and it has afforded me real pleasure to give to this work the wide circulation of the *Revue de France*.

CHAPTER I

THE RED TOWN

THE ancient city of Rodez in the province of Rouergue is built on a rugged hill which seems to cling to the mountains behind it and, looking down on the swirling torrent of the River Aveyron, forms a most fitting stage for a sinister and sanguinary drama. Imagine the striking façade of the cathedral with its steeple rising above it, clear-cut as a piece of Japanese ivory and surmounted by a huge statue of the Virgin. Below the great church, with its turrets and pinnacles, the roofs of the buildings are heaped so closely together that they remind one of a flock of sheep crowding out of their fold. Here and there are patches of green made by the trees in the main streets and on the public promenades, but the most striking feature of the town is its dark purple-red colour, which is to be found nowhere else in France. The stone church is red, the houses are red, and the whole town seems, as it were, bespattered with red; even the waters of the River Aveyron are of a reddish hue.

The whole of the surrounding landscape is in harmony with the town which forms its central point. It is encircled by a grim and unsmiling amphitheatre of mountains; the only features to be remarked in the country round are gloomy clumps of chestnut trees and red fissures in the earth—paths cut in the solid rock which overhangs deep valleys, the pasture land of herds of cattle,

red in hue as the soil they tread. The river, hemmed in by sloping meadow lands, flows deep in parts through dark echoing caves. The entire district is pervaded by the same strange feeling of vague melancholy and the fear of the unknown.

In the year of grace 1817, when lumbering coaches still ploughed laboriously through the district, travellers might in fine weather have taken Rodez for a Spanish town, if only the sun were shining. After crossing the ramparts one came upon a network of narrow and evil-smelling streets where darkness closed in early and the air was thick with the whirring flight of bats. All that caught the eye were huge monuments recalling war and riots, and there fell on the ear the melancholy tolling of bells or the hasty blare of a trumpet.

The people of the town are of an austere type, punctilious in the discharge of their duties, thrifty and hardworking, forming a small world of their own without any opposing elements, and imbued with no deep sentiment other than religious fervour, which is pushed to the verge of fanaticism. There is no theatre in the town and no music—if, by chance, the silence is broken by the sound of a hurdy-gurdy, the poor women exclaim with delight, "How pretty it sounds—why don't they play every evening!"

Most of the aristocratic families have returned from exile, but their resources are now but scanty and they are forced to lead a very simple life, while the richer middle-class folk hold themselves aloof and associate solely with one another. The officials are the only people to hold weekly gatherings, which are intensely respectable and very dull and where there are as many priests as ladies. No one seems to have the heart for distraction or amusement—

each spends his life brooding over the dramatic happenings of the past and shrinking in nervous distrust from the future.

There is a rough peasant population—the men are tall and strongly built, their hair springing out in tufts from beneath their broad-brimmed felt hats; the women, sometimes dressed in red but more often in black, are vigorous but ungraceful. The weather is often bad, and the peasants are crowded together in their ill-ventilated, draughty cottages in close proximity to their animals. This is the same even in the town, where every family raises a pig in order to augment its scanty means—in fact, the number of pigs in Rodez amounts to about one-fifth of the entire population, and in every street you meet them, grunting and munching, adding certainly to the squalor, but performing the office of scavengers by devouring the refuse.

It may easily be imagined that these ignorant peasant folk are extremely superstitious. There is no district so rich in folk-lore as the Rouergue; the country, watered by the Aveyron and dominated by the tall red town of Rodez, is full of ghosts, spooks, witches and brigands. When the evenings draw in and the wind moans through the chestnut groves, tale follows tale of a kind that makes one's hair stand on end with terror. Evil influences haunt the night. The peasant, his eyes dilated with fear, thinks he sees mysterious beings and feels himself under the sway of unknown forces, but in the morning he becomes somewhat reassured by the sight of the Virgin standing calmly, despite the storm, on the summit of her scarlet tower.

In this district political events have produced no great reaction, and in spite of the insane cruelty of Chabot, the ex-Capuchin monk, the White

Terror has done no very great harm. The people of the Rouergue have ever remained submissive to established authority, and so they watched the passing of the Revolution and of the Empire without very strong feeling and saw the Bourbons return without any great enthusiasm. Happily, the excesses of the White Terror ceased at the edge of their valleys. It is true that Toulousé saw General Ramel perish, Avignon lost Field-marshal Brune, from Nîmes was snatched General Lagarde, and the report of these dire deeds penetrated even as far as Rodez. But no voice was raised in protest, only a vague disquiet was felt by the citizens, who were haunted by the fear that one day the "brigands" might penetrate into the Rouergue and commit crimes of a like atrocity within its peaceful borders.

There is, however, another source of disquiet which affects the citizens of Rodez more closely, and that is the presence of the garrison stationed in the town under the command of General Vautré. It is only recently that General Vautré has been promoted to the command—previously he was a colonel and had won promotion for crushing a revolt in a south-eastern province of France. In these days General Vautré and his aides-de-camp, with the mien of heroes, stride gallantly to the sound of jingling spurs and sabres through the streets of the little town.

"It is common knowledge, though still spoken of only with bated breath, how promptly General Vautré had suppressed a Bonapartist rising in the province of Dauphiné. He had had a number of the insurgents shot down, others put to death and, as president of the war council, had brought about the summary execution of twenty-one unfortunate

people besides. So the peace-loving citizens of Rodez, far from being reassured by the presence of the gallant general and his officers, are always afraid lest their presence may stir up feelings of revenge among the "ultras," and it is with a certain dislike that they listen to the galloping of the cavalry through the wide boulevards of the town.

The women, on the contrary, gaze with delight from behind their small diamond-paned windows at the prancing cavalcade. In a town so void of distraction the sight of these fine troops, many of whom had been in action on almost every battlefield of Europe, the recollection of the revolt which they had so determinedly repressed, their striking uniforms and their plumed caps make a stronger impression on these provincial ladies than is altogether desirable.

It is certain that the officers are not unaware of the flutter they create, and one of the most interesting topics of conversation in Rodez at this time is the discussion of the various intrigues which, it is only natural to suppose, would result from the presence of a considerable garrison who found time hang heavy on their hands. If the wives and daughters of the worthy citizens find the gallant officers only too attractive, the citizens themselves have very different views on the matter and would gladly dispense with the entire garrison.

Occasionally, the somewhat apathetic population is roused into more than vague uneasiness by some strange crime committed in the neighbourhood. For instance, on September 2nd, 1816, in the neighbouring town of Espalion, the tax collector's strong-box was rifled in broad daylight, and grave suspicion fell on a member of a well-known and

6 *The Murder of Monsieur Fualdès*

highly-respected family, and what was more, the crime seemed to be the repetition of a similar one committed three years previously, the perpetrators of which had never been discovered. The local magistrates have been subjected to so much anonymous annoyance, to such a host of threats and libels, that they are intimidated and feel themselves without authority or support in that solitary provincial town.

Suppose now, during this period of unrest teeming with fear and suspicion, some terrible event were to take place, one that involved political quarrels, the reputation of several important families and the transient love affairs of officers of the garrison, would not the already inflamed imagination of the entire population conceive the wildest theories and ascribe a most far-reaching significance to the deed? The murder, if murder it were, could not possibly be merely a commonplace and brutal assassination. Rodez of the red soil, so long as its name and history survive, will ever be remembered by its association with the story of its great crime.

CHAPTER II

MONSIEUR FUALDÈS

ON the evening of the 19th of March, 1817, M. Joseph Bernadin Fualdès had gone up to his study. He was a man of about fifty-six years of age, rather short but well-built and with features of a kindly and attractive type. His forehead was lofty, his nose well-shaped and his mouth benevolent, though somewhat full-lipped ; his short side-whiskers were characteristic of his profession of magistrate. He was wearing a long blue coat, black waistcoat, grey trousers, and a high cravat. Altogether he would certainly be considered by most people to be a very handsome man.

On his writing-table lay a small elongated book bound in calf, which looked something like a prayer-book. This was the diary written by his father, Jean Baptiste Fualdès, a barrister of Mur-de-Barrez in the Aveyron district and himself the descendant of a long line of ancestors, all of whom in their turn had been notaries. Honest fellows these, who feared God and had begotten large families, some of whom had served their country and others had entered the church. This sturdy line of lawyers could be traced back to the beginning of the sixteenth century.

In the little book bound in calf which his father had bequeathed to him, Joseph Bernardin had himself carefully entered all the principal dates, and events of his life ; his birth, his school, his

graduation at the University of Toulouse, (that smiling Toulouse of the eighteenth century, rich in palaces and churches) his call to the bar, and his return to his native place at the dawn of the Revolution.

His career had, in fact, been determined by the progress of the new political ideas. When, in the early days of the Revolution, the local assemblies were called on to formulate their grievances, it was to him that his fellow-citizens of the district immediately turned, and in that task he had spared neither time nor trouble. At that time he had not long been married and had three young children, but the desire to play a part in public affairs swept him away—he became the executive officer of the Directory in his district and later in the Department of Aveyron. Memories of the past crowd thick upon him as he sits dreaming in his darkening study. He sees once more the planting of a tree of liberty crowned by a cap and pike, amid the repeated shouts of, “Long live the nation! long live the king, long live liberty and equality. Liberty or death.”—He hears the salvoes of artillery, he sees the people taking the oath of citizenship and the National Guards hugging one another with joy. And he sees himself, M. Fualdès, the public prosecutor, making an eloquent and impassioned speech to the crowd, and at its close, with a grand gesture, waving his hat adorned with the tri-coloured badge. A few days later, after the birth of his daughter Pauline, he is standing in the Town Hall demanding that civil registration should be established and denouncing the opposition of the clergy.

Can it be possible that this peaceful citizen, in his blue coat and high collar, has been a Jacobin, a hater of all religious orders? It is hardly likely,

since this ardent republican had, like so many others, an uncle who was a canon and three aunts and a sister who were professed nuns. His own home had often given shelter to those very priests against whom he thundered, and he never hesitated to show mercy to those over whom he had judicial power.

Still, M. Fualdès was not considered to be lukewarm in his republicanism, and had sat as one of the jury of the revolutionary tribunal. Many a terrible recollection of those times comes into his mind, and especially he has never been able to forget that beautiful head with its streaming black hair, the marble-white face of Charlotte Corday, whom he had been unable to save from the guillotine. Once more he hears the tumult of the mob as the head of the victim is displayed to their gaze.

This was one of his saddest recollections, but what rankled the most with him was that only lately, after the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, he had been accused of helping to send Queen Marie Antoinette to the scaffold. This was obviously a slanderous untruth, and yet he had been obliged to vindicate himself. He certainly had not condemned the queen, he had absented himself from the trial; and he had done something even more courageous—he had openly pleaded for the acquittal of General Custine, and this was remembered with such bitterness against him that it was not till he returned to the Rouergue that the incident passed into oblivion.

Strange indeed that he could have ever been deemed bloodthirsty. On that March evening of 1817, the erstwhile public prosecutor sat in his office and smiled bitterly, as he thought of the old

days when the accusation of undue moderation and luke-warmness had been levelled against him.

He compared himself to the man who, when asked what part he had played during the Revolution, laconically replied, "I lived through it." He too had lived through that era of terror, ever hoping for better days to come.

And at length the better days had dawned—the Terror had passed away and the Directory was set up. Fualdès retraced his footsteps and returned to his old profession. The retired administrator of the province of Aveyron went back to Rodez, never to leave the town again, and there he played the part in which he will ever be remembered by posterity.

At first he remained public prosecutor, but later his functions were merely those of a local magistrate, and in this capacity he performed his duties conscientiously and with punctilious regard for constituted authority. He was made judge of the criminal court and then reappointed public prosecutor under the Empire. And despite changes, jealousy, intrigue, and the attacks of men bent on obtaining office on a change of government, he kept his position secure. It was only recently that he had been compelled by a law of the 25th December of the preceding year to retire into private life.

M. Fualdès lets his gaze wander round his study, in which he has now but a short time to remain. The government of His Majesty, Louis XVIII., has just granted him a pension as a reward for his long and honourable services, and the time has come when he may rest from his labours. Very soon he is going to leave this house at the corner of the principal square in the town, which for so many

years has been his official residence. He will have no regret at leaving the important public duties which his fellow-citizens had entrusted to him. He has no longer any ambition to become a member of the legislature. All that he wants now is to return to the little town of Mur-de-Barrez, where his own father and mother had lived and died, where he himself was born and had spent his childhood and his youth—Mur-de-Barrez, that picturesque and ancient town, the scene of so many happy hours, the place where he had gained his earliest triumphs and begun his own married life. It was in that district, which he loved so dearly, that he had been wont to spend his vacations, and it was there, in the company of his beloved wife Pélagie, that he used to watch the harvesting of the corn and grapes.

Yet he and his wife had not been without their share of sorrow; of their three children only one had lived to grow up, their son François Didier, but he had always been their joy and pride. He had gained distinction at college, and later in Paris he had obtained an appointment at the Council of State. The first Restoration put a check to his career, but during the Hundred Days he had been made a sub-prefect. For the time being he has no fixed appointment and has just married the daughter of the gallant Colonel Vigier, a distinguished soldier of the Empire. The thoughts of M. Fualdès dwell lovingly on the young couple and on the pleasure he hopes to obtain from their company, which will brighten his retirement and be a comfort to his old age.

He has worked hard and made many sacrifices in order to ensure his son's happiness, and these sacrifices have by no means been small ones. It

was a very heavy expense to give his son a really first-class education and his income has never been a large one. From the time of Cicero landowners have complained of the small profit derived from their estates, and so M. Fualdès has been compelled to raise some capital by selling a portion of the lands which were dear to him, both because they had been so long in his family and because he had a taste for literature and read the *Georgics*. It was only quite recently that he had sold his estate at Flars to M. de Séguret, the president of the tribunal, for the sum of 68,000 francs. The amount was payable in certain securities, and on the very day before this he had received 26,000 francs of the price.

The whole amount, together with his pension, will just enable him to pay his way, for all the offices he has held have been an expense to him instead of a source of income.

In this workroom of his, where he has toiled so hard at his legal work, no client, however corrupt, has ventured to offer him a bribe, knowing only too well how useless would be the attempt. But many poor people have been here hoping for the disinterested advice of the learned lawyer, and never have they been refused. He has acted as arbitrator and peacemaker in the most violent family quarrels, and his advice had invariably been followed. In such fashion may one's life be worn and spent without the reward of riches.

Still, as M. Fualdès looks back on the past, he has a feeling of satisfaction, and he does not think he has a personal enemy in the world. This is quite unusual in the case of a public prosecutor, especially at an epoch when the laxity of morals was counter-balanced by the severity of the laws, and civic

disturbances, with all the accompanying bloodshed, had naturally inclined the minds of those in authority to the most harsh and repressive methods. Though steadfast in the execution of his duty and an upholder of justice, Fualdès was not over-harsh, and, though he held the office of public prosecutor, he did not like, and never had liked, inflicting punishment.

As his mind dwelt on the past, the sudden dark evening of March closed in on the old town and the streets were soon in total darkness. The peace of night crept over Rodez, which had been in somewhat of a turmoil during the day, as was only natural on the third day before the mid-Lent fair, and the whole town seemed to have gone to sleep. From the high steeple of the cathedral eight o'clock is slowly tolled, and from the distance comes the blare of bugles sounding the retreat somewhat earlier than usual, a wise precaution to prevent any brawling between the citizens and soldiers, when both are somewhat in liquor. The shutters of the last shops are closed and night has begun.

M. Fualdès must go out, and, while he is making his final preparations, his thoughts dwell on the happy future that is opening out before him. He pictures himself settled in Mur-de-Barrez, surrounded by friends all proud of his long and brilliant career, and he revels beforehand in the thought of the impression that will be created in the village by the sight of his fine embroidered coat. He will be one of the leading figures of the place, and he will certainly endeavour to set a good example to all. May it not even be possible that he, once a revolutionary, may take his seat on the rural district council! He is an elder of the masonic lodge of Rodez, but there is no reason he should

not hold both these honourable positions simultaneously, and for a long time past he has attended the philanthropic meetings of his lodge as regularly as he has been to mass and vespers and taken part in the processions of the church. His thoughts dwell on the pleasant restful life he will lead in the country, its repose interspersed with the study of farming and friendly intercourse, and how he will enjoy his freedom from business and politics as he chats about the state of the crops. And there will come to his house his son Didier, with his wife and the children, who will not fail to bless their union. The bride has already decided that if her first child is a girl she shall be named Atala. Her father, the colonel, is to be a welcome visitor and rest from the toils of his profession, and the house shall be open to aunts, cousins, to his dear godson and his wife, and to all his other relatives and friends. M. Fualdès has so many friends, and Pélagie will entertain them with country delicacies, cooked as she alone knows how; they shall have trout from the river, fresh gathered mushrooms, and snipe shot in the district, washed down with the native white wine or a delicately flavoured ciaret.

But now is not the time for dreaming, as he has to go out this evening. Two of his old friends, M. Sasmayous and M. Bergounian, are keeping Mme. Fualdès company downstairs in the drawing-room. They often come to talk over all the little happenings of the town and to tell one another stories of the days gone by, but on this occasion they must do so without him.

M. Fualdès takes his watch from his waistcoat pocket and hangs it on a small hook near the mantelpiece, for it is wise to take such precautions on going out at night. Next he puts on his cloak,

picks up his hat and stick, and conceals beneath his cloak a somewhat bulky package which he takes out of his writing desk, and then he goes downstairs. He shows himself for a moment in the room where his wife and friends are sitting, and bids them a brief but hearty good-night. His trusted manservant, Guillaume, opens the house door for him and speeds his master on the way with his usual foolish grin.

M. Fualdès takes no lantern with him, goes out quickly into the night and at once disappears from sight—either the darkness is very dense or else he has already turned the corner into the Rue du Terral. Far in the distance can be heard the strains of a hurdy-gurdy grinding out its melancholy tunes.

Have you taken a good look at your master, Guillaume—it is to be hoped that you have, for you will never see him alive again!

Where was M. Fualdès, the ex-public prosecutor, going on that evening of the 19th March, 1817? No one will ever know for certain.

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE OF BANCAL

THE next morning about six o'clock, a tailor's wife from a neighbouring village, who was walking along the bank of the Aveyron, had a terrible shock. Just below a mill-stream, at a point where the river flows in swirling eddies, she had caught sight of a body turning over and over in the water.

Shrieking with terror, she rushed to the mill, and the miller, a man named Fouquier, hurried to the spot accompanied by servants and neighbours. They descended the river-bank and drew out their gruesome find, which they laid all dripping on the slope.

There was no difficulty in recognising M. Fualdès, for the body had not been long in the water. He was dressed exactly as he had been on the previous evening, with his high black cravat round his neck ; but he must have received some deadly wound, for the body looked to be quite bloodless and was so inflated with air that it had floated on the surface of the stream.

• There was great consternation when the discovery was made that the public prosecutor had been murdered. It was a very grave matter, and Fouquier, who was by no means devoid of common sense, forbade any one to touch the body of the victim and sent at once for the proper authorities.

At Rodez they go to bed in good time, but, on the other hand, they have the excellent habit of

rising early. So while on this lovely spring morning the riverside population was hurrying in panic towards the mill, the dire news was already spreading through the town. M. Teulat, the examining magistrate, and M. Bornes, the deputy public prosecutor, sent in haste for M. Rozier, a physician, and M. Bourguet, a surgeon, in order with their help to make the investigations required by law. Then, accompanied by their officers, they betook themselves to the place where the discovery had been made.

• It was nine o'clock and the sun was already high in the heavens when they reached the scene. The crowd of curious onlookers was made to stand back and the men of science bent over the body.

With a pair of scissors M. Bourguet cut away the high black cravat and then the wound was displayed. It was a very deep one, fully three and a half inches long and involving the complete severance of the jugular and carotid arteries. Death had been immediate owing to the great loss of blood and the rush of air into the lungs. The wound appeared to have been made by some not very sharp instrument, such as a knife, or a bad razor used like a saw. One strange fact was that there were no other signs of violence on the body.

In stupefied silence the magistrates made notes of these important surgical investigations, but beyond this they had no definite idea of what to do next, except that it was evident they must remove the body from the sight of the crowd, which was increasing in number every minute. Every inhabitant of Rodez was clambering down the river slopes and hurrying towards the mill. They had to make up their minds what their next step should be.

The difficulty was to decide where the body of M. Fualdès should be taken. His old friend Sasmayous, who had hastened to the spot, was in despair and declared that he had not yet ventured to break the awful news to the widow. It would have to be done with extreme care, and her friends had not yet decided what course would be best to pursue—in any case the body of M. Fualdès must not be taken to his own house. It was eventually agreed that the murdered man should be carried to the masonic hall, which was situated in a secluded part of the town. It could be hidden there from the gaze of the curious public and, at the same time, the poor wife would be spared the shock of so tragic an arrival at the house.

This arrangement was carried out, and soon the dense crowd parted to allow the passage of a gloomy little procession—a carriage followed by officials and police and containing the body of the man whose lips were sealed in silence and could never yield the secret of his last moments. A deep shudder passed through the crowd, and the women, attracted as they usually are by scenes of horror, seemed likely to faint. Even the children, who are always excited and amused at any turmoil, grew pale at seeing the terror of all the onlookers. . . . And already from the distant town was heard the solemn brazen tolling of the cathedral's passing bell.

Fualdès' house, so calm and quiet on the previous day, was now a scene of alarm, turmoil, and confusion. Relatives and friends had hastened there. The night had been an anxious one and the dawn had spelt disaster. In the Rue de l'Ambergue and in the City Square close to the house, crowds of people were continually gathering and dispersing, and fresh groups constantly forming. Sasmayous

and Bergounian, the friends who had spent the previous evening at the Fualdès', were going into the house, coming out again to hear if there were any fresh news, then hurrying back to the sobbing widow and discussing the situation with one another.

Drawing his friend aside in the hall downstairs, Sasmayous, his eyes inflamed with weeping, began feverishly: "This blow was struck by the Royalists, and we ought to have foreseen it."

"Do you think so?" asked the other, lowering his voice.

"Surely it is quite obvious. You have only to think of the positions occupied by our poor friend—magistrate under the Empire, one of the sincere republican party which rallied round Napoleon, and a Bonapartist of the type detested by the brigands of the White Terror. It was they who murdered General Ramel."

"But it was two years ago that Ramel was murdered."

"True, but his death has never been avenged, the Court of Toulouse has not tried to secure the murderers and now it will never find them. Justice has not been done! The agents of the Terror are encouraged by our weakness to commit crimes with impunity and take revenge for the wrongs which they themselves have suffered. If we allow these crimes to go unpunished we shall all fall victims."

He was silent for a moment and then continued with quivering lips:

"They have made a good beginning with a former president of the Directory, a former juror of the revolutionary tribunal—the man who had avenged Marat and who, it was believed, had condemned Marie Antoinette to death!"

Bergounian still seemed hardly convinced, so the other continued :

"Consider the facts carefully. Would not ordinary criminals have taken the elementary precaution of ensuring that the victim's body should be sunk to the bottom of the water ? Is it likely that they would cast a dead man into the river without fastening a weight to his head or his feet ? Certainly not, my friend. These people are seeking to crush us with *their* Terror—with cold-blooded cynicism they have advertised their crime as an example of summary judgment without appeal. I must own to you that I should not have been surprised even if we had found pinned on the breast of the unfortunate public prosecutor a paper with some such inscription as, 'Let the justice of the King be done !' To my mind it is there as plain as if I had seen the writing."

Suddenly Guillaume, the man-servant, looking more bewildered than ever, appeared at the doorway and cried out, "M. Sasmayous, M. Fualdès' walking-stick has just been found !"

"Where was that ?"

"At the corner of the Rue du Terral near the Rue des Hebdomadiers."

They all hurried out and stopped at the evil-looking cross-roads, where a number of people had already preceded them. The Street of the Hebdomadiers, so called after certain priests attached to the cathedral (the Hebdomadier was the priest whose week it was to officiate) had become one of the most sordid spots in Rodez. It was a narrow thoroughfare running parallel to the Rue de l'Ambergue, but connected with it by an even narrower cross-road and opening out close to the City Square into an unsavoury byway. The

dilapidated houses, crookedly built and with roofs all awry, were huddled together and yet looked as if they were trying to keep apart. A foul stream crept stagnantly through their midst, and from its depths of sewerage rose a foetid and poisonous odour.

None of the inhabitants of the street were to be seen standing at their doors—they seemed quite unaware of the tragic event that had taken place in the town. They were hiding behind their shutters, which were faded and rotted by rain and storm. But the other citizens of Rodez, prompted by their dislike of this tainted street, were cautiously and suspiciously examining all the surroundings.

By the time that Sasmayous and Bergounian arrived at the place, there was no longer any doubt on the matter. A suitable setting for the murder of M. Fualdès had been found. And now, after the discovery of the walking-stick—as it were, a ray of light in the darkness—it was inevitable that another clue should be found, and so it was; a handkerchief, rolled up and torn, was fished out of the stream.

"It is a gag," some one exclaimed.

"Yes," said another person in frightened tones, "I can see marks of teeth on it."

It was possibly one of those pads which country women use to balance their baskets on their heads, and the marks on it may have been caused by rubbing, or very likely by the sewer-rats, but no one thought of that. The whole matter was quite clear. Fualdès had been set upon at the corner of the Rue du Terral; he had been immediately gagged and thrust into the yawning jaws of the Rue des Hebdomadiers by the miscreants who were his self-appointed judges and executioners. Sasmayous had been perfectly justified in his theory

—the facts bore it out completely ; they were not on the track of a commonplace and futile crime, but of a strange, terrible, and stupendous drama.

When had the murder taken place ? In the alley itself or in one of the shuttered houses with which it was lined ? Every single mind leapt to the same conclusion—it must have been at Bancal's house.

In the town of Rodez, where hypocrisy was rampant, the house of Bancal had a very evil reputation. Some were openly hostile to it, others pretended to be, and many people prided themselves on their virtue in loudly condemning it. It was on account of this house that people avoided the dark and winding alley in which it stood, and at nightfall self-respecting women were terrified of being seen anywhere in the neighbourhood.

Looking at the house from the outside, there was nothing particularly unprepossessing about it. It consisted of two storeys and an attic, and each floor was lighted by two windows. It sheltered beneath its roof an ill-assorted medley of persons. The principal tenants were of course the Bancals themselves, and certainly they were not very desirable people. The husband was a mason who did a little work occasionally at one place or another, but he did not earn sufficient to maintain his family of five young children. So his wife Catherine sought other means of livelihood. It was easy for any one to slip unnoticed into that street at night, and he was sure of receiving hospitality which, if not very luxurious, was at any rate discreet. Catherine Bancal will be accused by many on the morrow, but, had she chosen to speak, she could have told many strange tales about her accusers.

Her eldest daughter Marianne contributed

something already to the family's support, and there were other resources too. On the floor above lived two couples also not above suspicion, Antoine Palayret and his wife Rose, and Jean-Baptiste Colard, artisan, boon companion and fluent talker, and his mistress, Anne Benoît, a laundress, and, in addition to these, the Saavedras, a Spanish couple, who had been exiled from their country, although the husband was a judge, and were stranded, heaven knows how, in this strange abode.

Not a single one of these persons mingled with the groups which formed and reformed in the Rue du Terral, but, before the day was quite over, a few of the passers-by ventured to come a little nearer to the ill-omened house. Its silence was still unbroken, and it looked even more gloomy and threatening than before. The thought of the connection between the murder and its sullen silence bestowed on the house a kind of tragic greatness, and in their mind's eye the spectators pictured behind the closed shutters great stains of blood, heard the ghastly sound of scrubbing, and saw the ineradicable traces of human cruelty.

Sasmayous had gone with all speed to the law courts, where M. Teulat was writing down the various statements of witnesses. It was essential, he urged, that the Bancal's house should be searched without delay.

The next day there was an angry scene in the City Square. It was understood that Constans, the chief of the police, had entered the house of crime, but had found nothing suspicious there. The front door, which bore the ridiculous number 605, opened into a passage leading into an inner courtyard. On the right as one entered there was

a kind of hall from which a staircase led to the upper floors. Opening out of it was a good-sized kitchen with two windows, one looking on to the road and the other on to the courtyard, and out of this again there was a tiny scullery. Upstairs there was nothing but the bedrooms of the various lodgers, and Constans was unable to find anything to justify him in making an arrest.

At first the mob outside the house seemed undecided what course to take, but Sasmayous hastened to address the onlookers and rouse them to action. He spoke in low tones but very emphatically, and it was easy to read on his clean-shaven face traces of all the sorrow and anger that he felt.

"Constans is a traitor," said he. "From the first moment that he began this investigation I had no confidence in him. We know only too well how he obtained his position. He is one of those fanatical Royalists who detest the constitutional government we now enjoy, and have vowed to put us again under the tyranny from which we suffered before the Revolution. He hated our dear friend Fualdès."

"M. Sasmayous," broke in a ragged fellow of the type that was bound to detest the police, "I am sure that Constans was in league with *them*. Anyhow he gave them a helping hand, because the night rounds of the police were stopped the evening before last. No doubt that was part of the plot."

"And the barracks had been closed earlier," prompted another.

"Believe me, the general was in this too."

"And the chief constable as well," asserted a third person.

The faithful friend of the dead man made hasty notes of all these statements, and added the names of the witnesses. Soon he was surrounded and

hemmed in by hatless girls and light-fingered youths, in fact by a whole set of rogues, all eager to make accusations against the authorities who kept them in check. He built up, so to speak, an entire scaffolding of inquiry, pushed on with his investigations and sought for clues, before the law had even commenced to put its machinery in motion.

In short, it was decided that the finding of the walking-stick and the supposed gag must lead inevitably to a searching inquiry about Bancal, who had been overheard to utter threats against M. Fualdès, because he had sentenced a woman who had killed her child, only to a short term of imprisonment. Bancal was a low villain and his wife no better than himself, so it was quite probable that both had had some share in the murder. Yet it was hardly likely that such people as these had committed so great a crime on their own initiative, so search must be made for the instigators who had bribed these wretches to do their bloody work for them.

Two days elapsed, two terrible days, during which no arrest was made, and every one felt oppressed and very uneasy. All deemed themselves suspected and suspected every one else. Members of the noblest families, who were most closely connected with the royalist party, were more anxious than any one else to put an end to this uncertainty and prove that they were not involved in the affair, and so they were the most active in the search for the criminals. All united in urging M. Teulat to clear up the mysterious crime, the scene of which, they felt certain, had been that house of ill fame.

On the 22nd March a sweeping raid was made on the house, and Bancal, his wife, their eldest

daughter, the Palayrets, husband and wife, and Jean-Baptiste Colard were arrested."

The result of their examination threw no light on the crime, but some important results followed from the arrest. It did something to allay popular impatience, it turned the minds of people in the desired direction and strengthened the belief of those who had hitherto been undecided. A fresh search in the house had produced several pieces of rag stained with blood, with regard to which Constans had previously accepted the first explanation that was offered. Now they created a tremendous impression, and witnesses poured in from all sides. Some of these declared that, between eight and nine o'clock on the evening of the 19th March, they had heard men playing a hurdy-gurdy in the Rue du Terral and the Rue des Hebdomadiers. Other witnesses asserted that a group of men carrying a heavy burden had been seen to stop at number 605. Some one had heard one of Bancal's little boys call out to his sister Magdelaine, who was cutting a slice of bread for him, "Not with that knife! Not with that knife! That is the one that killed the gentleman!"

Immediately, without waiting for the inquiry before the magistrate, popular imagination ran riot. The children must have seen the murder of M. Fualdès; from them the whole story would be learned. But it was hardly necessary to hear their account. Every one had reconstructed the scene to his own satisfaction, under the influence of old popular tales, vague recollections of melodramas, and reminiscences of romances of crime. Every person in Rodez could give as full and detailed an account as if he had been an eye-witness. Each could tell how Fualdès had been dragged into the

Bancal's house by a band of royalists and done to death with a blunt carving-knife. None of the most appalling details of the crime, or of the way in which all traces of it were removed, were omitted. And when the hideous deed was done, the body had been secretly carried away and cast into the river. The coarse pictures displayed outside the booths at country fairs, the rough designs splashed with red on the sheets of ballads that were hawked about gave shape to the thoughts of the ignorant countryfolk, and so before any confession had been made, even before any definite evidence of any kind had been found, a minute account of the whole tragedy was common talk throughout the district.

This account was fully confirmed at the orphanage where the Bancal children, including the second girl, had been placed under the care of the nuns. Magdelaine, a sharp-witted child of nine, became the heroine of the day. She was interviewed in the parlour by a crowd of people anxious to see and question her, and all the inquiries made were based on preconceived theories. When the child gave the answers that were wanted, pence were slipped into her hand and sometimes even silver coins. People in every class of life cross-questioned her eagerly, those of high rank, like General de Vautré and various other members of the aristocracy, because they were anxious to divert any possible suspicion from themselves, and those of a lower station because they wanted to get confirmation and detailed proofs of the theories they had already formed. Among the throng of visitors were seen on one occasion the King's almoner, on another day the prefect himself, who was determined to find a clue to a crime in which he was confident he saw the hand of the *Ultras*—the White Terror

had been crushed everywhere else, and it behoved him to see that it did not reappear in the district of Aveyron.

With her husky voice and common accent, Magdelaine Bancal answered all the questions put to her, and as she spoke, the drama was unrolled in all its hideously improbable detail. To judge by the thrills of fear which ran through her audience, it was evident that they were quite ready to be convinced by the sly and greedy gutter-child, and yet the riddle was far from being solved.

Was it possible that this terrible political vengeance, this punishment worthy of the White Terror, could dwindle down to a sordid murder in a house of ill fame; and were the residents of that house the only actors in the lurid drama? Surely behind them must lurk the masked chiefs of the Terror, who had started their campaign of revenge by inflicting the penalty of death on the hapless Fualdès. So the whole population gave itself up heart and soul to lift the tragedy out of the ordinary ruck of crime and to find a criminal worthy of its wrath.

Presently a report became current that a suspicious looking individual had been noticed on the outskirts of the City Square on the night of the 19th March. Some passers-by had seen him hiding at one time in a recessed doorway, at another keeping a sinister watch in a back slum. He had struck one man such a violent blow that the latter had run away immediately without waiting for anything more. Another eye-witness had made out that the stranger was carrying a gun in his hand. The man had in fact every mark of a conspirator—his hat was pulled down over his eyes, he wore long boots and a loose cloak, and, moreover, he was very tall, not

much below six feet in height. It would have been very extraordinary if he had passed unremarked by any one.

As the outlines of this strange figure became more clearly defined, more and more people claimed to have seen him. It seemed that the head of the conspiracy possessed the gift of ubiquity and also that, although he had endeavoured to conceal himself, he had been noticed almost everywhere.

Such is the psychology of crowds—tiny incidents, almost forgotten, acquire an extraordinary significance when associated with other incidents. A passing shadow, the sound of a footstep in the road, or some quite commonplace meeting, are all that is needed for the construction of some wild hypothesis. Apart from those whose interest it is to remain silent or keep strict guard on their words, where is the man who prefers to say he knows nothing or has seen nothing?

Moreover, public opinion, somewhat annoyed at the wretched scapegoats offered to it by the police, eagerly fixed on the giant as the arch-criminal. Here, according to all the evidence, was the real chief of the brigands, the man who had initiated the criminal career of his band by murdering M. Fualdès. Such a figure as this was not inconsistent with the drama played in the house of Bancal.

So it was with a certain amount of gratification that the inhabitants of the district heard, on the 25th March, of the arrest of Bernard Charles Bastide-Grammont, a man who was well known to be five feet ten inches in height.

CHAPTER IV

MONSIEUR BASTIDE

THE Bastide family was one of the most prolific, rich, and respected in the Rouergue. At this time the head of the family was an old soldier eighty-eight years of age, who had served for many years in the king's guard, and on retirement from active service had become a justice of the peace. He had seven children, three sons and four daughters, all of whom had made excellent marriages into the best families of the province. One of his sons was the Bernard Charles who had just been arrested.

He was a fine young fellow and a good representative of a family whose men were characterised by their vigour and height, their manly and regular features, and whose women were noted for their beautiful dark eyes, charming appearance, and graceful carriage. This young man was acknowledged to be taller and stronger than either of his brothers, and all the people of Rodez admired, but were somewhat in awe of, this busy fellow whose round head was covered with thick brown hair and whose glance was so quick and penetrating.

• His disposition was in harmony with his looks. Bastide-Grammont, as he was called to distinguish him from his brothers, was the exact type of the country squire, of more culture and intelligence than most, but passionate and devoid of self-restraint. He was a fine sportsman, boastful and quick-tempered, with a large appetite and a roving

eye, and he could hardly be judged by the standard of ordinary men since his nature was more ardent than theirs. There is no proof that he was a bad son, yet he often had violent and painful scenes with his father. His wife was most tenderly devoted to him, and their household was a united one, and yet he was attracted by other women and was the hero of many stories that circulated in the village inns. He always liked to have the upper hand and, even in jest, was somewhat too free with his stick and his fists. In short, he had a violent nature not overburdened with scruples and a law to itself.

In the country he was in his true element, for to men of his calibre an open air life is a necessity. At the time of his marriage he had been given by his father, as part of his inheritance, an estate only about six miles distant from Rodez, and there he occupied himself with agriculture and cattle-breeding. But, like all other wealthy landowners of that time, he had himself to see to the purchase and sale of his securities, since Stock Exchange quotations were not then in use. So he did this business in the square of Rodez, and apparently with success; and his skill in finance may have aroused a good deal of jealousy and ill-will.

Besides this he was closely connected, both by his own family and by marriage, with the royalist party and had never taken office under the Empire. He belonged to that rich middle class which was in close social relations with the aristocracy, and hailed the return of the Bourbons as eagerly as if the king had come back to France solely to deliver the people from the oppression of the Empire. It was even asserted by his enemies that he had been at the head of a considerable band

which formed a serious menace to the revolutionaries. During the reaction after 'the Reign of Terror' he had been seen with a white cockade in his hat, galloping at the head of a band of reckless young blades like himself.

Still, whatever his political opinions may have been, they did not prevent him or any of his people from being bound to the Fualdès family by the closest ties of affection. In these provincial districts such close friendship amounts almost to blood relationship. Bernard Charles was the godson of the former public prosecutor, and Mme. Fualdès called him her "son." Wherever his godfather was, he was always welcome. Sometimes he would arrive suddenly at Serres (M. Fualdès' country house) in the midst of one of his interminable tramps after game over fields and hills, dirty, muddy, and perspiring, tired out but good-tempered, and he was always sure of a warm welcome. Every one got up from table to wait on him. He would refuse to sit down, pretending that he was in a hurry, or that he had already had dinner, or that he was not hungry, but no excuse was ever accepted. His gun and game-bag were taken from him by the ladies, honest Guillaume stooped down to pull off his boots, and M. Fualdès would send for a bottle of his best wine from the cellar in honour of his godson.

At Rodez it was exactly the same thing, but this time the country squire was not in pursuit of game but of his creditors, and the big young man, usually so ready for a jest, became for the nonce an acute business man. When he arrived in the town, usually on horseback, eager to exchange the produce of his cattle or vines for good hard cash, it was always at his godfather's that he put up in preference to

anywhere else ; a place was always laid for him and his room was always ready. They were continually hoping for a visit from him, and since Didier had gone out into the world to seek his fortune, young Grammont was always looked upon as a son of the house. This intimate friendship was so well known, that it was for Bernard that M. Teulat sent immediately, in order to obtain his help in discovering the murderers of his godfather. A messenger started off at full speed to summon him as a witness and found Grammont not at Gros, but near by at his farm at Morne, where he was calmly watching some field work, as he sat reading his paper in a rustic arbour. It was then two o'clock in the afternoon.

M. Bastide was deeply moved by the terrible news, but did not hesitate for a moment to answer the summons, and soon afterwards he was seated in the private room of the investigating magistrate.

Unfortunately, Grammont was able to throw hardly any light on the matter, as he had not dined at his godfather's house on the 19th March, although he had been invited ; he had been delayed by the curé of Saint-Meyme, and had called at his house to settle some funeral expenses and other church accounts. Later in the afternoon he had gone to Rodez and hastened to his godfather's, but M. Fualdès was not at home. He had waited till Fualdès returned and the retired magistrate had discussed some business affairs with him. He wished to realise part of the bonds which M. de Séguret had just sent him in part payment for the estate at Flars, and he wanted his godson to carry out the transaction for him. This was not an unusual request, and Bastide had set off at once to see what he could do, as his godfather wanted ten thousand

francs in cash forthwith. But he found it impossible to realise the bonds so quickly, and even M. Julien Bastide, the banker of Rodez, would only take a bond of a hundred louis for which he paid 1945 francs in cash immediately.

"When I had finished that transaction," concluded the big man, "I had some affairs of my own to attend to, and at half-past six in the afternoon I went back to Gros. So I am in complete ignorance of anything that happened at Rodez during the evening."

M. Teulat did not appear satisfied—he frowned and bent closely over his documents as if trying to decipher an illegible phrase. None of this evidence gave the slightest indication as to what had happened during M. Fualdès' last walk, nor even as to what had directly preceded the catastrophe. And while Grammont went back to Mme. Fualdès, who wept in her "son's" arms, the investigating magistrate was reading the whole deposition over again and becoming very much annoyed at it.

Two or three days elapsed and M. Bastide did not return to Rodez, but, on the other hand, witnesses poured in bringing the strange stories we have already heard, and bewildering afresh the household in the Rue de l'Ambergue, which was only just beginning to shake off its stupefaction and grief.

Didier, the son of the murdered man, had fallen ill, overcome with grief and horror at the news of the crime, so that the first to arrive at Rodez was his father-in-law, Colonel Vigier. In order to spare the unhappy widow any unnecessary trouble or anxiety he did not stay with her, but with his close friends, M. and Mme. Jausion, Bastide's brother-in-law and sister. But every day saw him at the

Fualdès' house, making investigations and carrying on the inquiry which had been started by Sasmayous. They collated their information, accusations and suspicions. They dug in the most unsavoury ground and extracted a little of everything—truth, falsehood, insignificant and improbable details, stories that were possible and those that were hopelessly absurd.

One evening Didier himself emerged from the mud-splashed coach and came to join the overstrained household. With pale face, flaming eyes, and lips pressed together in grief, he trembled as he entered the house where his father no longer awaited him; blinded with tears he stumbled into his mother's arms, muttering threats of punishment and revenge.

He had left his wife at Lentat, their home in the Auvergne, and had come alone in order to devote himself entirely to his inexorable duty. That evening was a very painful one and was to be followed by other evenings still more painful. In this hectic family council it was only too fatally easy to mention names and formulate the most absurd hypotheses.

"Who could it have been?" cried Didier. "Could it have been the Laqueilhes, the Lagoudalies, the Bonalds, or any other of my father's former creditors, eager to make use of politics as a means of escaping from their debts?"

"Didier," interposed the Colonel, who had kept silence up to that point, "we have more exact information now. Bancal's little girl has made a statement and accusations, which your servants and neighbours have corroborated. There was a certain man who was seen in several places during that dreadful time—on the evening of the 19th

March he was prowling about the outskirts of the town, and on the morning of the crime he was in the Rue des Hebdomadiers. . . .”

“And he was seen here,” added Sasmayous, “in this very house, dressed like a peasant, with muddy boots and an old hat, at the very time they were taking your poor father’s body out of the river.”

“What is his name?” shouted Didier.^f

“Wait a minute,” continued the Colonel. “When M. Teulat came here to speak to me he encountered that man in your rooms, and the man was evidently terrified at his appearance.”

“He is already being pointed out in the streets,” said Sasmayous. “When he went to Mass last Sunday all eyes were fixed upon him and he cannot long escape the hand of justice.”

“But tell me his name,” repeated Didier, who could scarcely restrain himself.

“It is difficult to disclose his name to you,” answered the Colonel, “and if my friend Jausion were here, I would not venture to do so. You must prepare for a very painful surprise, and you must believe that it was only after long hesitation that we decided to make the accusation. Your father’s murderer was . . . Bastide!”

Didier started violently—he was appalled by the news and wanted to protest against the absurdity of such an accusation, but he looked round and every one was silent. The Colonel’s face was stern and unyielding, and he bore without flinching his son-in-law’s wordless scrutiny. Sasmayous confirmed the dreadful denunciation by a silent nod, and Mme. Fualdès, huddled in an arm-chair, sobbed wildly and inconsolably. A new drama had begun, and one that was infinitely longer,

more drawn out and more mysterious than the first.

The next morning M. Teulat summoned M. Bastide to amplify his evidence. At first the witness repeated all that he had already said. He added that he got back to Gros about eight o'clock in the evening, had supper there with his wife and sister-in-law, Mme. Vernhes, and went to bed at ten o'clock ; the next morning he had left his house at half-past five in order to superintend some work on his farm at Morne, and he had stayed there till the arrival of the messenger from the court. The people who asserted they had seen him at Rodez during that period had completely confused the days and times. He was certain of that, and it could be proved. M. Teulat said nothing and the squire repeated his statements, but, disconcerted at the magistrate's continued silence, he stammered slightly.

At this point the investigating magistrate, who had never taken his eyes off the young man, determined to try dramatic methods and trap him unawares. Rising to his feet, he said in deep and thrilling tones, "Bastide, *you* are the man who murdered your friend, Fualdès !"

Bastide leapt up and almost sprang at his throat. Making no effort to restrain himself, he shouted with rage, "How can you, a magistrate, forget yourself to such an extent ! How dare you say such a thing—you must be mad !"

In the midst of his outburst M. Teulat had him arrested and taken to prison, while a tremendous hubbub arose in all the lobbies of the court.

At Gros on the evening of the same day, while

Bastide's wife and sister-in-law were wondering why the master of the house had not returned home, an unexpected visitor was announced—M. Portier, a justice of the peace.

This M. Portier was related to them, and at first they thought he had come simply to pay them a friendly visit and have a chat ; but from the outset it was evident that he had come merely in his official capacity, and with great courtesy he proceeded to explain his exact object. He was empowered to make certain inquiries and came in order to clear up what seemed to him to be a misunderstanding. Could the ladies give the authorities fuller information than their husband and brother-in-law had been able to do ? They must speak freely and fearlessly. What exactly did they know ?

As a matter of fact they knew very little, but they could vouch for the truth of Grammont's statements. It was absolutely certain that he had come home on the 19th March, and his wife had been with him all the time. His sister-in-law had seen him put on his nightcap and slippers so as to have his supper in comfort, she had heard him extinguish his candle and, in the night, she had even heard him talking to his wife. The servants could bear witness to these statements, and they had not failed to do so both at Gros and at Morne.

Some fifteen inquiries of this kind and minute and fruitless investigations removed the judge's suspicions, and gradually the feeling of discomfort which the ladies had felt on his arrival was dispelled.

As they went back into the dining-room, which at Gros was used to receive visitors, kindly M. Portier said, " Well, I think they have been rather over-hasty. I thought so before, but now I am quite sure that the truth will come to light. I will go back

to Rodez, hand in my report, and to-morrow M. Bastide will be released."

The two unhappy women who were standing before him, their sewing in their hands, looking almost as if they themselves were guilty, gazed at him anxiously.

"Oh, sir, do not say that to console us," they begged.

"Certainly not, I am quite sincere in what I say. All the statements I have collected have been spontaneous and consistent enough to remove any possible suspicion."

"But what suspicion?" asked Mme. Bastide.

"Oh," said M. Portier, with a gesture of contempt, "that of public opinion. When the police who arrested your husband left the Law Courts, they told everybody that the murderer of Fualdès had been found. Then there was such an outcry, such a storm of anger, that I admit that even I was alarmed."

And as Mme. Bastide shuddered, he went on hastily, "Yes, yes, I know quite well that it would be impossible to find any sufficient motive on his part for such a crime, but you simply cannot realise the state of mind of the townspeople, who are usually so unmoved. To-day they are beside themselves. They are quite ready to see in your husband the agent of a powerful secret society, the executioner of royalist schemes of revenge—they are still terrified by stories of the White Terror."

"But, sir," said Mme. Vernhes anxiously, "how can that be sufficient reason for prosecuting my brother-in-law? He does not take any part in politics. The people who represent the ideas and principles which everybody is eager to destroy,

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could be more reasonably accused than M. Grammont."

M. Portier agreed. "Yes," he said, "better victims should be sacrificed to the shade of Fualdès than the miserable wretches who have been so easily collected in the Rue des Hebdomadiers. But anything may happen. Nobody ever knows what is likely to emerge from a police inquiry. Fortunately, however, my mind is quite at ease. It is impossible to suppose that all the servants that I have questioned—a class of people usually more inclined to betray their employers than to serve them—have lied to save M. Bastide. I shall point out that my inquiries were made without warning, whilst M. Bastide was unexpectedly detained in prison. I do not believe that any one can possibly imagine that he had bribed his servants in advance and entrusted them with his secret. I say again, and I shall tell the examining magistrate, that any such thing is quite inconceivable. I beg you, ladies, set your minds at rest."

He spoke with composure, and his benevolent manner and open countenance showed his satisfaction, yet the trembling women hardly dared venture to put any questions to him.

At last Mme. Vernhes broke the silence by saying, "What is your own theory of this horrible crime?"

"It is very difficult to express an opinion," said M. Portier, "for if one paid attention to all that people say, one could go to any length. I am convinced that it was a political crime. The Military Court has already taken cognisance of the case on the ground that it was a crime committed under arms, but really because it sees in it a renewal of our civil troubles. Undoubtedly, a large number

of people are involved in the conspiracy, but it will be impossible to get hold of all of them."

"Have many been arrested up to the present?"

"Yes, but they are a poor lot. Besides the first haul, which included the Bancals, the Palayrets, and Colard, they have taken Anne Benoît, Colard's mistress, and various habitués of the dens in the Rue des Hebdomadiers. Let me see if I can remember their names." After a moment's reflection he added, "Yes, there was first of all Missonnier, the knife-grinder—you must have noticed him. . . ."

"No."

"He is almost an imbecile, one of those people who, in a place like Rodez, where amusements are scarce, afford so much pleasure to the idlers in the streets. When he has no knives to grind, he roams about the town and haunts the drinking-bars, doing all kinds of silly things, or he goes down to the river and is addicted to wading in and throwing stones at the fish. If he were not such an idiot he would have been drowned long ago. I cannot imagine how he could have been concerned in the murder of M. Fualdès."

"What about the others?"

"The others are more important. There are two of them; the first is a smuggler of very bad repute named Bax or Bach; the second is a man named Bousquier, who was for a long time a collector of taxes, but has since sunk to the level of a mere labourer. There is not much against him, but he has been the associate of all the scapegraces of the Rue des Hebdomadiers, and it is possible that he may be frightened into making some admissions. M. Teulat expects a good deal from these two men."

"If we could only get at the truth," murmured the two women.

"Do not let yourselves be discouraged, ladies," said M. Portier, rising to take his leave. "I am sure that M. Bastide himself will help us so soon as he is set at liberty. He will realise that he must shut the mouths of his enemies and so justify the action of the police, who will certainly release him immediately."

And, gathering up all the notes which he had so carefully made, the magistrate turned towards the door.

It was growing late—M. Portier entered his carriage with a parting bow. He drove off at a brisk trot and disappeared quickly down the little lane which led to the main road.

The two sisters stood motionless, watching his departure; they were a little less anxious, but their eyes were full of tears as they gazed into the darkening night.

Suddenly there came a storm, battering against the shutters and shaking the doors, while the hail-stones rattled furiously against the streaming windows; they had barely time to get back into the house and fasten up. The judge's carriage was out of sight, and not a single human sound could be heard. Everything was blotted out by the fog and rain and, with the storm, a gloomy and starless night descended upon that lonely house and plunged it into overshadowing gloom.

CHAPTER V

WHAT BOUSQUIER SAID

WHAT M. Portier had said was true. He had spoken like a man of common sense, who refuses to be influenced by any idle gossip or mere fabricated tales. But, though he did not suspect it, he was almost alone in his belief, for a fantastic nightmare already obsessed the whole province, and especially the dwellers in that gloomy and superstitious town of Rodez.

As Colonel Vigier had stated, the little Bancal girl had spoken with the eager prompting and collaboration of the entire town, and this was her story: On the evening of the 19th March, Bancal's wife said to the children after supper, "Go upstairs to your bedroom. We have some business to do in the kitchen and you children will be in the way." This sort of thing often happened in the Rue des Hebdomadiers, so Magdelaine and her three little brothers, Jean, Alexis, and Victor went upstairs. But Magdelaine, who could hear the sounds of the hurdy-gurdy some distance away, was inquisitive and listened. She overheard voices in the kitchen, and it seemed to her as if some one were crying. Her curiosity overcame her fear and, slipping out of bed, she crept very quietly downstairs. Edging along the wall she made her way into the kitchen and, so well was the whole affair stage-managed, that she crept into a bed with drawn curtains which was close to the door. The

room was full of people, but providentially no one saw the small witness—the murderers were all busy and they could not think of everything.

So they went on with the execution of their crime, and the breathless child watched them with strained attention. How was that possible when the curtains were pinned closely together? Through a hole which happened to be in the material just at the level of her eyes, a hole which must assuredly have been made by the finger of Providence.

Magdelaine was thus able to see what was happening, and the sight was horrible. No writer of criminal fiction could have invented anything like it.

A man was lying at full length on the kitchen table and, holding him down firmly, was her father himself, Colard, the half-witted Missonnier, and some people she did not know, one of whom was lame and "walked funnily." Bastide, "big and dark," a frequenter of the house, was naturally in command of them all. Standing round were Anne Benoît, whom she believed was holding a lamp, her own mother, and three strange ladies, who served as chorus of the tragic drama.

The man lying on the table asked that they would allow him to say a prayer, and Bastide replied, "You can say it to the devil!"

"But at least let me be reconciled with God!"

"You can be reconciled with the devil!"

So they refused to let him die in a state of grace, just as Hamlet refused Claudius.

Finally, they pushed a pad of linen into his mouth by means of a stick, which they hammered in, and every one tried to plunge the knife into his throat: Bastide, the lame man who had not yet been discovered, and Missonnier, who jumped for

joy without knowing why. Meanwhile the women bent down to let the blood flow into a washing-bowl.

Thus the crime was carried out. The unknown women were threatened with the penalty of death if they betrayed what they had seen. One of the murderers parted the curtains of the bed, and Magdelaine, trembling with fright, pretended to be asleep, while he passed his bloodstained hands over her face. Then he went away and the little heroine returned to her spy-hole.

Were there no other witnesses? Yes, of course there were. Another lady, dressed as a man, came out of the scullery which led from the kitchen. Great heavens, whence did she come? Then followed the great pathetic scene—Bastide wanted to kill her, another gentleman intervened, and she clung to their knees calling on the Almighty. They consented to spare her life, but only after she had placed her trembling hand on the corpse and sworn to keep secret all that she had seen.

Next, the most extraordinary funeral preparations were made. The porter, Bousquier, was fetched by way of extra help, and a whole procession went out into the night to carry the dead man to the Aveyron.

It was useless for Magdelaine Bancal to stay any longer in the kitchen, so she went up again to her room and settled down to sleep with two of her little brothers, as peacefully as was natural for an innocent child who held in her small hand the punishment of the crime and the triumph of truth.

There was only one thing lacking to all these dramatic horrors: the pathetic episode, which stirred every heart and caused the tears to flow which people so dearly loved to shed in the year 1817.

This is what happened: the following morning Bastide returned to the Bancals to recover from the mistress of the house a ring with a glittering red stone which he had taken off the dead man's finger, and for which he generously gave her two crowns. But that was not the only reason why he had returned to the scene of the crime. Magdelaine heard him say to her mother, "You must kill this child who knows all about it—I noticed last night that she was not really asleep." This detestable ogre even offered four hundred francs to her unnatural parents, as cruel as the father and mother of Hop o' my Thumb, if they themselves would do the deed, and eventually Bancal gave way and consented. He told his wife, or shall we say his evil genius, that she need only send the child into the field where he was working and he would do the rest.

He would do the rest! It makes one shudder.

On the next day the ogress sent the little girl to take her father's dinner, and she went as obediently across the fields as did Isaac of old. She was not frightened, because she knew that her father loved her, and she was not mistaken. When, with the heroic candour which is only to be met with in children brought up in houses of evil repute, she said to her father, "Mother told me to remind you about what you had arranged with her," he burst into tears and said, as he kissed her, "Go home quickly, my child. Be good even in your bad surroundings, and do not follow the evil example of your mother." And, of course, he did not fail to give her a father's blessing.

To those sentimentalists who had steeped themselves in the story of *Celina, or the Child of Mystery*, surely this offered a full measure of varied emotion.

They were charmed to find in their own neighbourhood something which recalled the tales that had so deeply thrilled their romantic minds. Indeed, the tale which the child had told, silly yet tragic as it was, was believed by all, and for a long time it remained undoubted. To support it, to defend it against such timid criticism as did arise, to force people to accept it as the truth, every possible means was employed—the procedure of the Courts, eloquent speeches, the evidence of innumerable witnesses, and even confessions.

On the 28th March, less than ten days after the murder, M. Teulat was waiting for the porter, Bousquier, and seemed to be very harassed. Urged by the president of the Military Court, M. Enjalran, who wanted to bring the case to a speedy conclusion, he felt extremely perplexed by the conflicting accounts given him of M. Fualdès' death. M. Teulat was a capable judge whose acute mind had not been entirely blunted by professional pride. Seated at his writing-table on a raised platform, with his clerk by his side, he recorded the evidence so far obtained and tried for the hundredth time to bring something of order out of chaos.

In the leaden-hued wall of the Law Court, one of those walls which reek of melancholy and mischance, a door opened suddenly to admit a tall precise-looking personage. This was the provost (the head of the military police) M. de la Salle, dressed in uniform, his sword at his side and pistol in his belt. He rushed at the inquiry as if trying to take a fortress by storm.

"Well," said he, "we must finish this business to-day. As you insist on more authoritative evidence than this child's, no doubt you can get it, but as

for myself, I am satisfied with Magdelaine Bancal's tale."

"Would justice be satisfied with it?" asked M. Teulat, raising his eyes, wearied with incessant reading. "We must beware of yielding too readily to a fleeting impression . . . Our decision must be satisfactory, not only to our own contemporaries, but also to posterity, and we cannot be too cautious in our conclusions."

"So long as we do not seem to be making a covenant with the murderers," replied the provost. "And if we do not act energetically, we shall be accused of doing so."

He walked noisily up and down the hall several times.

"Believe me, I am not blind to any of the difficult points in the matter," returned the judge quietly. "But you know perfectly well that we cannot rely on the evidence of a child nine years old, to sentence her mother and her mother's accomplices to death. Although public opinion is highly inflamed against them, it does not demand that, nor would it even submit to it. It is therefore very fortunate that amongst this band of miscreants a man has been found to support the evidence of little Bancal. Up to the present this person has been very unwilling to do so—I wonder if he will make up his mind to-day."

"We will compel him," said the provost.

"The information which has been sent me from the prison is encouraging," continued M. Teulat, moistening his thumb to turn over the pages of his notes. "From the time we removed Bousquier from the other prisoners, Calvet, who is our decoy, has obtained a very marked influence over him. Bousquier seems to put a good deal of faith in him."

"Besides," added M. de la Salle, "this porter is one of the least corrupt of Bancal's household, and only wants to get himself out of the scrape."

"The point is to find out whether Calvet has obtained sufficient influence over him."

"You need have no doubt about that. It is perfectly simple to talk to him in this manner: 'At the present moment the guilt of Bastide, Bancal, and Colard is an acknowledged fact. You have been denounced as their accomplice, at any rate as regards carrying away the body. If you are so obstinate as to deny any share in the matter, you will be treated as an accomplice and you will have as heavy a sentence as the murderers. If, on the other hand, you confirm the child's tale, but make it clear that you had no share in the plot, and that you were engaged with Bach to go to the Bancals' house to carry away a parcel of smuggled tobacco, and that, once arrived there, you found it impossible to escape from the scene of horror which met your gaze—you will certainly be acquitted.' It is as clear as crystal."

There was a short silence.

"Calvet has been working for two days," replied the judge, "and so far his efforts have met with no success."

"Yes, but this morning, after a fresh discussion, supported by the reading of the penal code and a confidential talk with the jailer, Bousquier has promised to tell everything."

"Heaven grant that he may!" ejaculated M. Teulat. "It would extricate us from a terrible dilemma."

At that moment the angry murmur, which always accompanies and announces the approach of officers of the law, was heard outside. There

was a knock at the door and Bousquier was brought in.

Though pushed in roughly and chained like a felon, the man had nothing criminal in his appearance. His features were regular, though the lips were somewhat heavy, his forehead was low and his hair curly. On his face only one expression could be read, and that was fear. He seemed to be one of those commonplace people of whom fate, with her wonted irony, delights to make sport. Sunk in wretchedness and shame at his degradation, Bousquier was terrified lest he should collapse altogether. He felt as if he were on the edge of a precipice, and all he hoped for was that his handcuffs might be taken off so that he could try to cling to some support.

He was pushed towards the platform, where M. de la Salle was now seated with the judge and his clerk.

"Sit down, Bousquier," said the judge.

The porter took his seat on the witnesses' chair, with a gendarme on each side of him.

"You asked to speak to me," said M. Teulat, "so it is evident you have made up your mind to give up the foolish denials in which you have hitherto obstinately persisted. I congratulate you on doing so, and the law will take into account that your statement is a voluntary one. I am ready to hear you."

Bousquier, who was very pale, made an effort to control himself. He opened his mouth, but no sound came from it and he seemed quite dazed.

Did he still mean to refuse to speak? For a few seconds no sound could be heard except the provost's fingers tapping nervously on the table.

M. Teulat returned to the attack and, with that extraordinary ability to elaborate a single idea

with which men of law and preachers are so marvellously endowed, with that special ingenuity which consists in repeating the same thing in twenty different ways, he resumed Calvet's arguments. But it seemed unlikely that he would be any more successful. Bousquier's forehead contracted into stubborn wrinkles, and his wide-opened eyes were fixed on the ground, while his mouth was firmly set. And to the final question put to him by the judge, "Did you not go on the evening of the 19th March into the Bancals' house?" he only replied by a grunt of denial and a shake of his head.

The provost, who had been listening to M. Teulat's harangue with increasing irritation, came to the end of his patience and, jumping to his feet, he pointed his pistol full at the prisoner.

"So you won't speak!" he cried. "The worse for you then."

There was a report and an uproar, and a bullet was lodged in the panelling—M. Teulat rose to his feet and the porter fainted. The janitor of the Law Courts was sent for, who gave Bousquier a restorative, and gradually the poor fellow came to his senses, but he was in mortal terror. Torture had been abolished only about fifty years earlier, and it was quite possible that the Bourbons might have recourse to it again in very serious cases. Besides, the law always had a free hand, so Bousquier shuddered and resisted no longer.

Then there began a searching examination, which reconstructed the crime and made the popular version coincide with the inquiry, thus transforming a horrible nightmare into a still more horrible reality.

"Is it true that Fualdès was seized in the Rue

des Hebdomadiers and carried to Bancal's house, where his throat was cut ? "

" Yes."

" Is it true that Bastide was present ? "

" Yes."

A damning statement was thus built up bit by bit. It recorded that Bousquier did not become acquainted with Bach till the mid-Lent Fafr on the 17th March. On that day Bach came and asked him whether he would move a bale of smuggled tobacco, and said he would give him a similar job once a fortnight. On the 19th March he saw Bach several times and was eventually taken by him, at nine o'clock in the evening, into Bancal's kitchen. All the people mentioned by Magdelaine were there except the three unknown women, who had only been put in as an afterthought ; but, on the other hand, some unknown men were present—thus leaving scope for further investigations.

On the table was a large bundle wrapped in a woollen blanket, which did not look at all like a bale of tobacco. Bousquier saw quite clearly that it was a dead man, but there was no possibility of drawing back now, because the tall man, from whom they all took their orders, declared that any one who betrayed what he had seen would not live long, and looked meaningly at the gun in his hand.

The most gloomy funeral procession that had ever taken place was then formed. The body, placed on two boards, was carried by four men, Colard and Bancal in front, Bach and Bousquier behind. The tall gentleman walked at the head, and another one, accompanied by the useless and half-witted Missonnier, followed the corpse. Possibly some one carried a lantern, but that was not mentioned at the time.

The funeral procession started about ten o'clock in the evening; it came out of the Rue des Hebdomadiers, followed the Rue du Terral, crossed the Cathedral Square, passing between the Prefecture and the Cathedral, and went through the town gates into the Boulevard d'Estournel; there it stopped for a few moments so that the bearers might rest, and also to allow of the appearance of several new witnesses. Starting off again, they came to the end of the Rue de l'Ambergue, where they made another halt, and finally they took a cart track which would lead them to the River Aveyron. The path was narrow, so Bancal and Colard carried the body down it by themselves and the others followed with Missonnier.

In this strange way they walked nearly a mile before reaching the edge of the river. There they untied the ropes, took off the blanket, and cast the mortal remains of M. Fualdès into the water, without even troubling to fasten a stone round the neck.

It was a very dark night and, as they stood at the river's edge, before they dispersed, the two men who had directed the funeral rites swore their five accomplices to renewed vows of secrecy—the first who divulged a single word would be punished by death.

This done, every one went on his way; the tall man disappeared in one direction, the shorter one in another. Bousquier himself went back to the town and slept with Bach, who gave him ten francs and told him that the tall man was M. Bastide of Gros.

This concluded the statement, and when the informer left the Courts after this long interview, the case was established.

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Four years later, this same Bousquier died in the hospital at Rodez. Terrified at the approach of death and of a justice more searching than that of man, he signified to the chaplain his wish to confess and retract his statement of 1817. In a feeble hand he signed the following declaration which the Abbé de Séguret, brother of the President of the Court, laid before the judges after Bousquier's death :—

"I, the undersigned, being at the point of death, wishing to free my conscience from remorse, and repair as far as possible the wrong I have done, declare before God who knows the most inmost thoughts of my heart and that I do not lie, that all I said regarding the murder of M. Fualdès is ENTIRELY UNTRUE. That it was only the fear of death, with which I was threatened, which induced me to say I had been to Bancal's house and had been present at the drowning of the body. It was only to preserve my life that I made this declaration, which I now retract of my own free will and desire that this statement shall be made public after my death.

"Written at Rodez, in a ward of the hospital, on the 4th September, 1821.

"(Signed) BOUSQUIER."

But at the time Bousquier turned king's evidence no one could foresee what would happen at no very distant date in the future. Mme. Bastide and her sister, as they waited in anguish for Bastide's return, listened to the sound of the hail-storm beating on the fields, and tears flowed down on the idle hands from which their work had fallen.

Bastide's fate had been sealed and he was doomed irrevocably to the scaffold.

CHAPTER VI

MONSIEUR JAUSION

THAT same evening all the members of the military court assembled at the president's house, and mutual congratulations were exchanged on the bold and successful blow they had struck. All that had hitherto seemed doubtful to them they were now as ready to accept as the common people themselves. It was undeniable that the crime they had to consider was a political one carried out by novices in the art of murder, members of the middle-class, who believed that they were above suspicion.

"We must get the better of these people," declared Comte d'Estourmel roundly. "Forced to keep out of the way under the Empire, they are inclined to think now that the king has returned to France for no other purpose than to allow them to settle their private quarrels undisturbed. They believe they are above the law, and that no one dares lay a finger on them. They imagine that even their most unreliable accomplices and most dangerous witnesses will not betray them. They deceive themselves into thinking that all 'right-minded people' will be grateful to them for having rid Rodez of a former revolutionary, who had become an adherent of Napoleon. Gentlemen, you must free the government from the acts of men like Trestailon.¹ Do not hesitate—you have to deal

¹ *Trestailon*. A porter of Nîmes who, in 1815, was one of the organisers of the White Terror in the south of France.

with a powerful organisation, scoundrels belonging to the highest grades of society, members of noble families so closely united that they form a sort of clan who are determined to defy the power of the king, the judges, and the police, as they did for many centuries before the Revolution. Just as in that unfortunate affair at Espalion,¹ you will observe these clans and families acting secretly, intimidating witnesses, bribing jailers, spreading corruption and terror. Try to prevent their attacks, and the help of the government is assured to you."

In the great empty drawing-room, lighted only by a few stately candles, which cast queer waving shadows in the dark corners, the commanding voice rang out clearly. The other judges, MM. Julien, Bertrand, Boisses, and Teulat, sitting upright on their chairs, listened respectfully and impassively, determined to perform their official duties without wavering. The president, M. Enjalran, was the next to speak. "It is quite clear, prefect," he said, "that besides this Bastide, who merely happens to be the executioner chosen on account of his tremendous strength and ferocity, we shall come upon others equally guilty, whose fanaticism is even more strongly pronounced. One such man has already been pointed out to me."

"Who is that?"

"The nephew of this Bastide, Bessières-Veynac, the notary."

"Yes," said M. d'Estourmel, "I know him slightly and think him a very suspicious character."

"I would pledge my word that he was one of the gang," insinuated M. Teulat. "He must be the rather timid murderer to whom Bastide spoke so

¹ *Espalion*. A small town near Rodez, where the safe of the collector of taxes was robbed in broad daylight.

harshly several times. Bousquier will certainly identify him. I can quite well imagine him with his choir-boy's face and saintly manners standing by the fatal table. Urged by some evil-minded priest, he may have thought it a duty he owed his conscience."

"Besides, does he not belong to the Brotherhood?" asked the prefect.

They all looked at one another. It was quite true. Maître Bessières-Veynac, then twenty-seven years of age, had always been noted for his religious fervour. After working hard at Toulouse and Paris, he had returned to Rodez, where he had bought a notary's practice and joined the most advanced royalist and Catholic party. He would bring an entirely new element into the affair of the Rue des Hebdomadiers, and M. d'Estourmel thought it would be by no means a bad idea to discover him to be one of Bastide's accomplices. Bastide himself had nothing to do with the Brotherhood, and had merely been trying his prentice hand in carrying out the secret orders of the Jesuits. M. Decazes, the Prime Minister, would certainly be grateful to the prefect of Aveyron for formulating this idea, which would justify his saying to the king: "A political murder has been proved, as well as the share taken in it by all the accused persons, among whom are *ultras* and religious maniacs. All the reports go to prove that the crime was a political one. Ought not your Majesty to beware of royalists capable of such an outrage, whose actions will assuredly gravely imperil your throne?"

Speaking aloud, the prefect said, "I believe there is serious reason for suspecting this Bessières-Veynac."

"More than that," added M. Enjalran, "public opinion is most strongly against him. He was very intimate with his Uncle Bastide, and is making the most frantic efforts on his behalf. In order to prove his innocence, this nephew has sought the aid of all the most influential families he knows in the country and, unluckily, he himself is very well connected."

"He is a very dangerous person," concluded the prefect.

So gradually a picture of the crime was built up by the authorities as well as by the mass of the people, and the representatives of law and order did not break up their meeting till they had concerted a plan for arresting this good man and getting rid of him as quickly as possible. They would allow nothing to obstruct the course of the law, and they never suspected that, as the officers of justice went carefully on with their investigations, the whole position would suddenly change. But in fact, whilst the police authorities were proceeding cautiously, Didier Fualdès, who since his arrival from Lentat had been living with his mother, was devoting himself less to consoling her than to avenging his father. And at that moment, whilst he was trying to clear up the business affairs of his unfortunate parent, he made a discovery which caused him to cry out in amazement, mingled with grief and rage: "Jausion is in this too—he is one of them!" And his cry was immediately taken up on all sides.

On the very day that Didier had overcome his first feelings of stupefied despair, he was faced with a totally unexpected state of affairs—not only was he an orphan but he was quite ruined.

It was all in vain that he ransacked the drawers of the desk and the chest of drawers in the room on the first floor which his father had used as a study—he could find nothing but unimportant papers, and these not docketed. There were no documents of any use, no portfolios, no diaries, no securities. Could it be possible that the ex-public prosecutor had left to his family nothing but a legacy of poverty and evidence of almost inconceivable carelessness? Didier, who imagined that for the sale of Flars his father must have received at least fifteen thousand francs in ready money, could hardly believe his eyes. Sasmayous had just told him that bills drawn for considerable amounts by M. Fualdès were in circulation and that fresh ones were being found every day.

What could have happened? Was it possible that, during the confusion of the first few hours, and in the absence of the dead man's son, some robbery had taken place? This was Didier's first line of inquiry.

He questioned the servants as to who had been in the house on the 20th March when it was all in confusion. The answer was, only intimate friends of the family, Sasmayous, Bergounian and M. Jausion, with his wife and sister-in-law.

There was nothing remarkable about this, as M. Jausion was in constant communication with Fualdès. He was a stockbroker, with a well established business in the great square of Rodez, and the confidential agent of the murdered magistrate. It will be remembered that it was at his house that Colonel Vigier was being most hospitably entertained in Rodez. Jausion had married pretty Victoire Bastidé and had given a home to her widowed sister, Françoise Galtier, so that he shared

in the affection which the Fualdès had for Grammont, their godson, or "son" as they called him, and for all belonging to him. So when he appeared at his friend's house at eight o'clock in the morning to offer his sympathy and assistance, no one had been surprised.

But, ever since the arrest of Bastide, M. Jausion, his brother-in-law, as well as his nephew, Bessières-Veynac, had both been regarded with a certain amount of suspicion. Thirsting for vengeance, Didier now made a detailed inquiry among the servants.

"Who saw Jausion in the house—was it you, Guillaume?"

And honest Guillaume replied, "Yes, sir, it was he who broke open the writing-desk."

Didier sprang to his feet in consternation.

"What's that you say—he broke open the desk! Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"Because," stammered the poor fellow, "because it seemed to me quite an ordinary thing to do. M. Jausion is so fond of everybody here—directly he heard the sad news he came to see Mme. Fualdès. He went upstairs into the study with his sister-in-law and ourselves."

"What did he want to do in there?"

"I don't know—probably to search among the papers for some clue to my master's death. And as the keys of the writing-desk could not be found, he opened it by means of a small hatchet, telling us he used to see my master open it in the same way. . . . He looked at the papers. . . ."

"And what did he do next?"

"He cannot have found anything in particular, because I do not think he took anything away with him, not even the red or the black portfolio."

"But I could not find either of them."

"Finally, he replaced the top of the desk. Mme. Jausion and Mme. Galtier went on looking through the house with the maid-servants. You know every one was very distracted that morning. . . ."

Didier told him that was enough and considered for a time, then he called the maid-servants to continue his inquiry. They had not heard Guillaume's tale, so they said nothing to incriminate Jausion, but declared that Bastide had made his appearance during the confusion. Although he himself had asserted that he had not gone inside Fualdès' house till the afternoon, a maid believed she had seen him in the morning looking very anxious and distressed. He had asked for his godfather. *Moussu y es?* (Is your master at home?) he is supposed to have said. Or possibly he had asked if his sister were there (*Ma sœur y es?*) which was more likely. He was believed to have gone upstairs and wandered from room to room like the others. Under pretext of putting a bed straight, he had gone to the bedside and dropped a key, which they had afterwards found to be the one belonging to M. Fualdès' desk. It was all mere incoherent babble, but Didier became more and more convinced that, either in the morning or evening of the 20th March, the house was at the mercy of Bastide and Jausion. The former, as every one firmly believed, was a murderer, so why not the latter, who, besides being the murderer's brother-in-law, had ever since the 25th March been so eager to maintain his innocence and demand that he should be set free?

Didier sent for his two advisers, the Colonel and Sasmayous, who came at once in answer to his summons, and in a few words he explained the situation to them. Again they gave the matter

their serious consideration and the Colonel was very much shocked, for he thought highly of Jausion, and was unwilling to believe that he shared his brother-in-law's guilt.

"We must not come to an overhasty conclusion," said he. "As matters stand, we have before us simply two important facts which are closely related—the first is the extreme confusion in which your father's affairs were left and the second is the undoubted intervention of Jausion on the morning of the 20th March. It would have to be proved that the motive of his intervention was theft."

"Nothing easier," cried Didier, "everything is gone."

"Yes, but do you know what was there before? We have no papers, books, or register of securities which can help us to ascertain. What were the contents of the writing-desk? Except for the twenty-six thousand francs from the sale of Flars, part of which we have already traced, we are in complete ignorance. So we must continue our search, and above all we must try to find out what was the exact amount of the theft."

Didier was somewhat taken aback at these statements, and Sasmayous then thought it his turn to speak.

"Nevertheless, Colonel," were his first words, "it seems to me absolutely certain that a theft was committed."

"I think so, too, but I want you to notice this point," said the old officer reflectively. "Everything leads us to believe that M. Fualdès did not keep a large sum of money in his desk, so that the temptation would not have been sufficient for a man as rich as M. Jausion."

"Well, what then?"

"We must wait and obtain more exact information. I consider that we are faced with a deep mystery."

"A mystery that I will solve, Colonel," cried Fualdès' trusty friend and he hurried away.

That same evening he came back in triumph. "I have obtained the information," he said, "and we have trapped them both. I have seen various people, particularly President de Séguret, who has made the whole thing clear to me. Hitherto we did not know the real relations between Fualdès and this thief of a Jausion. A merchant in Rodez has assured me that our poor friend gave that scoundrelly broker the use of his name for Jausion's own purposes. You understand what I mean—Jausion borrowed for himself in the name of Fualdès and on the security of bills signed by him."

"Then," said Didier, "my father was a borrower in name only."

"Exactly," answered M. Sasmayous, "that seems to me to clear up the whole situation. Supposing the facts to be as I have stated, it is certain that M. Fualdès would have required some undertaking from Jausion or some indemnity in return for the use which Jausion made of his name."

"And it is *that* document which Jausion came here to steal!"

The three men were seated round a small table, and even the poor light of the solitary candle on it showed the strained tension of their faces.

"But that is not all," Sasmayous continued in that harsh voice of his, with its provincial accent. "We know for certain that Fualdès was anxious to pay his own personal debts as soon as he received payment in full for the sale of Flars; so it is

extremely likely that he wanted to withdraw from circulation the bills bearing his name. Learning that he had sold his principal property and was about to leave Rodez, the holders of his bills, thus losing both the personal guarantee of his presence and the security afforded by his landed property, would have made an excited attack on him, which our poor friend could have appeased only by showing them the collateral security proving that Jausion was the real debtor. In order to prevent such a thing happening, Fualdès must have applied to the broker and urgently requested him to discharge this floating debt. Jausion found he had only two alternatives, either to redeem a number of the bills which had been issued, and his lack of ready money rendered that impossible, or to submit to his collateral security being made public, an exposure which would have compromised his position and made him lose the confidence of capitalists."

"Or else he would have to suppress the demand and its maker and all the evidence of this awkward business," concluded Didier with a shudder.

"You are quite correct," said Sarmayous emphatically. "Your father was murdered, not on account of a few trifling debts, but in order to involve his heirs in claims amounting to a hundred or a hundred and fifty thousand francs, which were really Jausion's debts, and to extricate Jausion from the terrible position in which he had been placed by his misuse of the name of his too confiding friend."

This was only an ingenious theory, but it gripped their imagination and carried them away, thus rendering them incapable of any serious criticism of it. Even the Colonel no longer raised any objections, and only looked with horror at the

fresh abyss opened at their feet, which had been revealed by this second proof of treachery.

It was a strange thing that they did not notice how completely this theory had changed the whole aspect of the affair. Gone was the political crime and party vengeance with all its gloomy and sinister pomp ; it had given place to a most sordid murder amid incredibly degraded surroundings. The ex-public prosecutor had been the victim of thieves and sharpers, who had employed the cold-blooded methods of the *Francs-Juges*¹ and the *Compagnons de Jésus*.²

And now what part did Bastide-Grammont play in this new drama ? This arch-villain, who up till now had been the focus of every one's attention and who had always been considered the head and organiser of the plot, had perforce to play second fiddle and yield the principal part to his brother-in-law.

On the 8th April, Jausion was arrested, together with his wife and sister-in-law. All that he could say to exonerate himself was that on the evening of the crime he had gone home before nightfall, had his supper about seven o'clock, and that he and his wife had gone upstairs and to bed about ten o'clock. It was a poor alibi, not even so good as Bastide's, and the only witnesses he could produce were his wife, her sister, and the servants. If Bousquier could identify him, his fate was certain.

The two men were confronted with one another,

¹ *Francs-Juges*. Secret tribunal in Germany. 14th and 15th centuries.

² *Compagnons de Jésus*. Bands of Royalists who, after the 9th Thermidor, took a bloody revenge in the south of France on the Terrorists.

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but the identification was not complete. Prompted by the desire of the military court, Bousquier believed he had recognised Bessières-Veynac in the fatal kitchen, but it was possible that he might have confused him with Jausion. The two accused men were totally unlike one another—the notary was quite young, with a handsome face lighted by religious fervour, and it was quite impossible to take him for the stockbroker, who was over fifty, short, and with a dry, bony face, hollow-eyed and thin-lipped. So Bousquier, being rather at a loss, said only that he thought, “Jausion’s face was like that of one of the two gentlemen whom he had seen in Bancal’s kitchen.”

He could not change his mind quite so quickly. However, they kept the latest of the accused under lock and key, trusting that in course of time the porter would end by recognising him—and they were not mistaken.

By the end of a fortnight the drama of politics had been changed into a drama of money, and Bastide became involved in this too. With no proof except that of idle tales, one witness made out that Bastide also owed Fualdès a sum of ten thousand francs. This sum was a fortune to those people who retailed the story, but a trifling one to change an important landed proprietor into a bloodthirsty butcher! The tales spread and grew—there was talk of heavy and pressing debts, of urgent demands made on Grammont by his godfather, and Bastide was supposed to have said to him in a public street of Rodez on the very day of the murder, “Keep calm, I will settle your account this evening.”

This cruelly ambiguous sentence impressed itself at once on the popular imagination. Everybody

declared they had heard it said, and witnesses poured in in such numbers, that it seemed as if Bastide had spent the whole day, on that fatal 19th March, in shouting his enigmatic and bloodthirsty promise in all the four corners of Rodez.

With its usual stupidity, the general public was in no way undeceived by the way in which the character of the prosecution had been so entirely altered. It was quite indifferent to the disappearance of royalist intrigues and the machinations of secret societies: but the fact that a fresh romance, a drama of family interests, a story of society thieves, had just been grafted on to its idle speculations at once pleased and terrified it.

Moreover, the personality of M. Jausion afforded far more scope for their imagination than that of Maître Bessières-Veynac. It formed a much more striking contrast to Bastide's; they had already trapped the tiger, and now they had the fox.

Joseph Jausion, whose surname, like that of his fellow-prisoner, was Veynac, was born at a small château about six miles from Rodez. Believing his intellectual capacity to be small, his family intended to put him into business; and that was why, before the Revolution, he had entered the service of M. Brunet, a cloth merchant, as a clerk.

At this time, being very young, Mme. Brunet's fine eyes had more interest for him than trade profits, and a provincial love story, discreet but passionate, was unfolded in the seclusion of the shop. But there came a violent interruption to the romance, for the revolutionary Terror began.

In 1793, young Jausion, happening to be at Lyons on business for the firm of Brunet, found himself in the centre of a reactionary outburst;

it was just at the time when this great industrial town had risen against the Convention, as Bordeaux and Marseilles had done.

The clerk had no sympathy with the republican party; at the very time when M. Fualdès was on his way to Paris to become a member of the revolutionary jury, Jausion eagerly joined the ranks of the rebels. Forgetful of his business, his cloth and his yard measure, he went to the Marquis de Virieu and asked for a gun. He worked at the fortifications, and when General Carteaux' army laid siege to Lyons, he distinguished himself as one of the bravest defenders of the city—this timid little shopkeeper had become a kind of hero.

But it was all in vain. Lyons, taken by assault, had its name changed to Commune-Affranchie, and its streets ran with blood. For the time being, Jausion was not condemned either to the guillotine or to military execution, but was thrown into prison to await the arrival of the two great judges, Couthon and Collot d'Herbois.

Jausion gave up hope, but nevertheless determined to make a last effort. From his prison cell he managed to send a despairing letter to Brunet, a letter which was to prove his salvation, for it was addressed to a woman's heart.

Urged on by his wife's persistent pleading, the worthy Brunet hastened with her to Lyons. The situation seemed desperate. There was not a moment to be lost, and, while the doting husband set out for Paris to beg the support of the Aveyron representatives, Jausion's devoted friend remained at Commune-Affranchie and made every possible effort to procure the release of the royalist rebel.

Great is the power of a woman in love! Mme. Brunet soon found out that her beloved Jausion

was ill and being nursed by a sister of charity and a young novice, both of whom were most devoted to him. As good fortune would have it, these two were also natives of Rodez, and so a plan was concocted by the three women to secure the liberty of the young prisoner.

They obtained letters of introduction from M. Bô, the deputy of Aveyron in the Convention, and, armed with these, the cloth merchant's wife had no hesitation in seeking an interview with Couthon and Collot d'Herbois.

The latter was the easier of access. He was a strutting mountebank, vain and conceited, with pretensions to being a poet and an artist. His attitude was at first harsh and overbearing; then he considered Mme. Brunet more carefully and found her by no means unprepossessing—she was still charming, graceful, and very intelligent. She quoted dramatically the scene from *Cinna*:—

“ O siècles ! O mémoire !
Je triomphe aujourd'hui du plus juste courroux
De qui le souvenir puisse aller jusqu'à vous. . . .”

Collot made the appropriate reply, smiled and granted, not indeed young Jausion's pardon, but his removal to a hospital where it was possible he might be forgotten.

But Couthon, a horrible gouty old man, chained to his arm-chair or dragging himself about on crutches, was impervious to the charms of literature and far more difficult to persuade. His attention drawn to a rebel was tantamount to a death sentence, and so he annulled Collot d'Herbois' transient kindness and told the poor draper that her friend was to die.

But people of the Rouergue are not so easily discouraged. Mme. Brunet had cajoled one man by the help of a play—she intended to win over the other by means of his infirmity, and for that purpose she sought and obtained the help of M. Bô, who was a doctor.

So it came about that one day Bô, talking to Robespierre, said quite naturally in the course of conversation: "Sometimes quacks or herbalists are successful in cases where doctors have failed, and I have seen proofs of this myself. For example, citizen, I know a lady, a native of Rodez, who has a wonderful remedy for paralysis, at any rate for that form of it which results from gout."

"That is what Couthon has," cried Robespierre.

"Very well, I am convinced that if he wishes he can be cured."

"We must tell him about it at once," said Robespierre.

A letter was despatched to Couthon and he sent for Mme. Brunet, who arrived carrying a flask of some specific sent to her by Doctor Bô. When she left the study of the dreaded invalid she was without the flask, but she had a pardon for Jausion.

Such was the eventful love story of the broker's youth, which was still related with gusto in the drawing-rooms of Rodez. And its sequel was not less dramatic though more obscure.

All the persons concerned, the Brunets, Joseph Jausion, and the two devoted sisters of mercy had gone back to the Rouergue. But alas! it soon became clear to Mme. Brunet that the young novice felt more than mere sympathy for the clerk, and that the young royalist had fallen a victim to the blue eyes, pink cheeks, and tip-tilted nose of the twenty year old novice.

Poor Mme. Brunet had saved the man she loved only for another woman, for love is heedless of gratitude and,* after having risked more than her life, she found herself deserted. And then the unhappy woman who had run every risk, whom nothing had daunted and who for months and months had hoped against hope, felt that she was dying.

Being an earnest Christian she sought bravely to probe her wound and realise the extent of her unhappiness. She questioned the novice and, discovering that her love for Jausion, though passionate was as yet purely platonic, she conceived a remarkable plan.

When her waning strength warned her that her last hour was approaching, she sent for her husband and the two sisters of mercy, and during this last interview an arrangement was made so bizarre as to seem almost incredible, if it were not common knowledge what strange ideas are conceived by women whose love affairs are interwoven with mysticism. •

"I am about to die," she said to honest Brunet, who was sobbing bitterly, "and I have one favour to ask you." She pointed to the young novice and continued, "You know Marie Fraysse and appreciate her as I do. I am loath to leave her alone in the world, exposed to so many dangers. I know that she has a loving nature of transparent candour, but she is unsuited for a cloistered life. She was in love with a man who adored her, and she has resisted his advances. So she is worthy of you and worthy of the fatherly protection and affection you will bestow on her, and in return she will cheer your solitude. Do not leave her in her loneliness, and you will be doing your duty."

Having in this way made amends to her husband

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(or at any rate she thought so) for her unfaithfulness, and separated for ever the lovers who had brought her to the grave, Mme. Brunet died.

The honest tradesman carried out his wife's last wishes to the letter. Marie Fraysse gave up her religious vocation and spent some little time in retirement on a small estate in the neighbourhood of Rodez. When after a suitable interval she returned, the dead woman's last wish had been carried out. With the particular tact displayed at that period in matters of this kind, M. Brunet gave every one to understand that he had merely given her the protection of his name. Joseph Jausion, who had gone away for a time, came back to the shop and, as was only to be expected, became to the second Mme. Brunet what he had been to the first.

The years went by and at last an event occurred which brought the affair to a tragic conclusion. At the beginning of the year 1809, despite the fact that her husband was very old and decrepit, it was evident that Marie was about to become a mother, and she tried in every conceivable manner to hide her condition from M. Brunet. Under pretext of her serious illness the husband was taken away and an effort was made to be prepared for any eventuality. A disastrous turn, however, was given to the matter by her attempt to kill the child in a moment of delirium. A few days later, Marie Rose, Brunet's wife, was arrested and cast into prison. The case was tried at the assizes at Tarn, instead of at Rodez, and the unfortunate woman was acquitted. But the agonising strain was too great, and the poor little novice of years before, with her pink cheeks and tip-tilted nose, lost her reason and ended her life in a madhouse.

What exactly had happened ?

The public, always ready to make such stories, horrible in themselves, even more dramatic, imagined Jausion standing by his loved one's bedside, snatching up the child and declaring it should die, so that the truth might be hidden from M. Brunet, whose tottering footsteps were heard approaching. In maddened terror Jausion was supposed to have committed the murder and, placing the child in the hands of a servant, said, "Take it away and do what you like with it!"

Whatever may have happened he was in no way molested. Was this due to the fact that M. Fualdès, who was at that time judge of the criminal court at Rodez, had prevented any proceedings being taken against him and thus saved his friend? People went so far as to say that this tragedy had brought about a coldness between them, since M. Jausion knew perfectly well that the magistrate was fully acquainted with his past history and "could send him to the guillotine with one word." All this gossip of town and countryside threw no light on Jausion's temperament at the present time.

It was not many years earlier that this drama of love and hate had been played, and it certainly had done nothing to injure M. Jausion's growing reputation. The fact that he was the son of an official of the tribunal at Rodez and a nephew of the senior archdeacon of the cathedral was of no small advantage in helping to secure for him the high esteem, which indeed he seemed to deserve. The marriages of his two sisters had brought him into close connection with the best families of the district, whilst his brothers held important positions, one as mayor of his commune and the other as curé of one of the principal parishes in the diocese. His

wife had been a lovely girl of the Bastide family and they had three children, so that after many dangerous adventures fortune seemed at last to have smiled on him.

This man, who is lampooned in a well-known local ballad as a "miser," lived, on the contrary, in real luxury. At his house, which was a corner one in the Rue de l'Ambergue, opposite that of M. Fualdès and only a few yards away from it, he used to entertain people of the highest rank and fortune. There flocked to the broker's office as clients all the merchants of the district, and his drawing-room was the meeting-place of the best society of Rodez.

Mme. Galtier, also a Bastide by birth, lived with the Jausions as one of the family. Her husband had died the previous year after a long and painful illness and she herself had spent her youth and beauty in nursing him devotedly. At this time she was bestowing all her attention on her children's education and, in order to do this more effectively, she had come to live in Rodez where Mme. Fualdès, touched by her piety and goodness, had been her most intimate friend.

And now this peace was to be rudely shattered. It did not seem to matter that the fresh motive, which was thought to have been discovered for the murder of the public prosecutor, threw darkness rather than light on the accusation. The Jausions, even as the Bastides, felt a tide of hatred rising round them. All the hidden jealousy, unsuspected malice, the silent dislike which the sight of happiness and success always awakens, old business quarrels, the annoyance of those in debt who were being somewhat pressed for payment, the envy of less fortunate speculators and merchants—all this

revealed itself under pretext of virtuous indignation and love of justice. The two brothers-in-law experienced the bitterness of false friendship, for every one, except their own relatives, forsook them and clamoured for their death. The torpid city and province aroused themselves and, fiercely persistent, demanded that the crime should be expiated with their blood.

CHAPTER VII

THE SUFFERINGS OF BANCAL

ON the morning of the 5th May, some one knocked furiously at the Fualdès' house in the Rue de l'Ambergue. It was during the dark and misty hour just before daybreak, and in that ancient town still wrapped in slumber the violent bang of an iron knocker against the heavy oak panels of the door was clearly heard.

In answer to the summons windows were thrown open and at one of them appeared the startled face and dishevelled hair of Guillaume, the man-servant.

"Open the door quickly," shouted Sasmayous in an angry voice.

The servant hurried downstairs as quickly as he could, terrified lest the door should be broken down, and Fualdès' faithful friend dashed in like a whirlwind.

Sitting on his bed, his eyes still dazed with sleep, Didier listened to him without understanding what was being said.

"Get up, get up," shrieked Sasmayous panting for breath and thrusting the shutters wide open with his fist. "If you do not hurry, they will take them away from us!"

"Who will take them?"

"The judges of Montpellier. It has all been arranged by De Siran, the public prosecutor, and Maynier, the prosecutor for the crown, with the help of that scoundrel, Baron de Vautré."

Didier shrugged his shoulders. "Nonsense," said he, "it is impossible!" and he began to pull the blankets over himself again.

"Didier," cried Sasmayous in exasperation, "Didier, you *must* believe me. For some time past De Siran has turned against us and he has joined with Maynier, who has given him some private information, to have the case tried a long way from Rodez so as to save the criminals—just as they saved Ramel's murderers."

"I know."

"Yes, but what you do not know is this; the military courts claim that the case is within their competence, but the assize court has intervened and directed that the prisoners shall be transferred to the prison at Montpellier and the case tried there."

"Who told you that?"

"That doesn't matter, but the fact remains that, though all the conspirators were sworn to secrecy, the plot has been discovered. It was perfectly well known that we should oppose this change of venue, if necessary by force. Whilst M. Maynier was to continue the inquiry in order to humbug us, the police and the general, with fifty of the garrison, were secretly to take the prisoners away. And the plan is to be carried out this very morning."

Still Didier was not convinced. Overcome by drowsiness and imagining himself in the toils of some fresh nightmare, he tried in vain to straighten out his confused thoughts. He passed his hand over his eyes and pushed back the curly black hair which fell over his forehead.

"You must be exaggerating, Sasmayous," said he. "I cannot believe that the law would lend itself to such a trick. What would the municipal authorities say?"

"The insanitary state of the prisons here has been strongly brought to their notice."

"What does the prefect say?"

"He has also been prevailed on. You little know what they can do—your enemies are working whilst you are asleep. Mme. Pons, another of the Bastides, has gone to Montpellier and is doing her best to cajole the magistrates there, and they are by no means indifferent to the charms of the fair sex. They have all become your enemies. Now listen to me, Didier, and for your father's sake do not wait any longer. At this very moment he is being robbed of the vengeance which is due to him. A single moment's delay or indecision may ruin everything. You must come out at once and stop the removal of the prisoners. All the citizens of Rodez will help you."

In feverish haste, his face flushed with excitement, he dragged his young friend from the couch.

"I could hardly credit it either, but when I saw the police making for the prison I was forced to believe the evidence of my own eyes. And perhaps, while you are still hesitating to act, they are opening the prison gates."

Didier dressed himself hastily, convinced by the passionate pleading of the elder man. In a few minutes they were standing before the gloomy prison building where a large crowd, incited by Fualdès' friends, had already gathered and was growing denser every moment. The police were drawn up in line with their backs to the gate, and with difficulty tried to keep the crowd in order. There were threatening murmurs, which soon rose to curses and shouts of fury; but they changed to cheers when the son of the murdered man came on the scene.

"Friends," cried Didier, "we must not injure our just cause by rioting. All we ask is that the laws shall be respected. I am going to the military court which has the inquiry in hand and alone must judge the matter. We can only do what it decides."

M. Enjalran and his colleagues, who had been summoned hastily to the tribunal, knew nothing of all this agitation; they only knew that the matter had come to a serious pass and that they had a dangerous duty to perform. They took their places with that grave and heroic air assumed by a judge who is sure of his own infallibility in carrying out the decrees of providence, and sent for the crown prosecutor in order to hear his explanation. As the latter did not make any haste to appear, Didier hurried to his house, but the morning was already well advanced when he returned with M. Maynier.

The struggle had been a hard one, and the young man was pale and perspiring and his hands trembled with anger. He was followed by the public prosecutor, walking with his head bent and his forehead wrinkled in lines of care. Outside the court could be heard a sort of chorus of angry murmurs rising from the crowd.

"Sir," said M. Enjalran sternly, "the court apologises for summoning you so early, but circumstances have forced it to do so. We are informed that while we are still holding the inquiry, you have received an order to transfer the accused persons out of this district to Montpellier."

"That is correct, M. le Président," replied M. Maynier.

"In that case will you kindly communicate to me the orders you have received, which concern us vitally."

"I am unable to do so as my instructions are confidential," was the brief and somewhat hesitating reply. M. Maynier was a more enlightened man than most of the magistrates of his time, but somewhat lacking in decision.

There was an awkward pause for a minute, and then M. Enjalran went on speaking. He also was one of those people who possessed the faculty of using the same argument untiringly in twenty different ways. He tried to get some statement from M. Maynier, but the latter entrenched himself behind a barrier of professional secrecy, so that it was all in vain.

Suddenly rapid footsteps were heard and the tinkle of spurs sounded on the tiled floor. The door was thrown open violently to admit General de Vautré, riding-whip in hand. He was a well-knit man of medium height who wore his striking uniform to advantage. Looking very bad-tempered, for he was not used to being thwarted, he strode up to the witness stand.

"What is happening here, gentlemen?" he asked in a voice as shrill as a trumpet and without bowing to any one. "I received orders from my divisional commander to escort the prisoners to Montpellier at four o'clock this morning. It is now nine o'clock and I have not been able to carry out the order. I am told that every one refuses to comply with it, and that the whole population of Rodez is threatening to make an attack on my men on the pretext that you object to this transference. What kind of a jest is this?"

"It is not a jesting matter, sir," said M. Enjalran, rising to his feet. "We are here to see that the laws are obeyed and we will not allow arbitrary measures to be taken against them. So long as

the military court has made no pronouncement as to its own competence. . . ."

"I understand nothing of these quibbles," interrupted M. de Vautré coldly. "I have received an order and I must obey it."

"We are the only people who have the right to give orders here, sir," cried the president.

The general made a threatening gesture and the president's colleagues sprang to their feet as one man, while Didier, Sasmayous and the crown prosecutor surrounded De Vautré, all talking at the same time, and tried to calm him, but only succeeded in making the dispute more bitter.

"I have heard enough of your chatter and speeches," cried Baron de Vautré in a voice of thunder. "If you do not grant my application of your own accord, you will be sorry for it, gentlemen. The king shall know of your refusal and will cast you out of the tribunal—and if you do not open the prison and give up the prisoners I will give orders to force the doors."

A tremendous uproar ensued, which was echoed by the tumult outside. The general and the crown official, surrounded and hustled, escaped from the court into the great outer hall, but as they were about to cross the threshold of the Law Courts, the sight which met their gaze made them pause.

The angry scene in which they had just taken part was but a peaceful prologue compared to the one awaiting them. The old town was seething with excitement even more violent than on the morning of the murder. Framed by the porch, the road seemed to be black with crowds—townsfolk burning to avenge a victim of the White Terror, members of the nobility eager to show that they

were innocent of any share in the crime, a tattered mob delighted to hurl insults at the representatives of justice and the King's army, and the lowest classes of the populace, so long repressed and now hopeful of seeing the era of the Revolution begin anew. All these people were imbued with the same fury, and threats were shouted, fists clenched, and knotted sticks brandished in the air against Maynier and De Vautré, while close at their heels followed Didier, hurling angry invectives at them. A stone whistled through the air and rolled inside the court.

"I will give the order to charge," said the general, "and we shall soon get rid of this rabble."

"You must do nothing of the kind," replied M. Maynier, who had turned remarkably pale. "You had better follow me and avoid a calamity."

Making way to allow Didier to go down and address the crowd, he dragged the general, who had not lost his nerve, back into the hall. The doors of the court were closed behind them, while numbers of sticks and stones rattled against the wood. The two men went up again to the prosecutor's private room and for a long time the general's shrill voice could be heard alternating with the magistrate's gruff one. They had lost their opportunity.

Outside, a dazzling May morning shone over Rodez. Followed by hootings and hisses, soldiers and police made their way back to barracks, while Didier Fualdès, who had been hoisted on to a tree stump, swore in the sight of Heaven, and amidst the plaudits of the crowd, that he would avenge his father or die.

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M. Maynier, the crown prosecutor, was very worried—some little time had elapsed since the 5th May and his position had become more critical every day. He had been forced to bow his head beneath the storm. Strong in its victory, the military court had asserted its own competence and had committed for trial all the prisoners except Bessières-Veynac, who was so evidently innocent that it was impossible to place him in the same category as the others. A faithful mouthpiece of public opinion, the court made strong representations to the Minister of Justice concerning the behaviour of General de Vautré, who did all he could to efface himself. Even the crown prosecutor was not immune from blame and only escaped reprimand owing to the clemency of the court. The military court, upheld by the prefect, Comte d'Estourmel, by the municipal council and all the authorities who were in any way influenced by public opinion, sustained its position triumphantly and kept the prisoners at Rodez till the day of the trial, which was to be even more impressive than any one had ventured to hope.

On the 29th May, the Court of Appeal at Montpellier had given a decision which, it is true, finally quashed the committal to the military court, but sent the case to the Assize Court of the Department of Aveyron. So it was from the people of the locality itself that the jury would be drawn and they would keep strict watch on the eloquence and persistence of the prosecution.

For some time after this decision M. Maynier still hoped to escape this kind of public attention, which would be very embarrassing for the prosecution. The Supreme Court of France could still, if sufficiently good reason were shown (just as in

the instance of the robbery at Espalion), send this murder case before a jury at Montpellier, Alby, or Carcassonne. But it was a vain hope, because the whole town and the entire countryside rose up in revolt against the possibility of such a decision. Didier set out for Paris armed with numerous and strongly worded petitions. From that obscure province there was wafted to the capital a cry so obstinate, persistent, and impassioned, that in the end it could not but prevail. In June the great drama was put down on the cause list of the assizes at Rodez for the August sessions.

During those long summer evenings M. Maynier's thoughts dwelt on his opening speech for the prosecution, and his reflections were far from pleasant. When the business of the day had been transacted, he would walk up and down his study and wonder uneasily how he could succeed in making a plausible and coherent case out of all the mass of confused and conflicting evidence which was heaped on his desk. On whose story was it to be based? Should it be on Magdelaine Bancal's, which could only be re-read with a shrug of disbelief; or on Bousquier's, which was so incomplete; or on the gossip retailed in the public streets? Even the black robe and ermine of his office would be of little avail to him in presenting an indictment based on such evidence.

For the hundredth time he ranged before his mental vision those who were to stand in the dock, and tried to fit them all into a conspiracy which might have a semblance of plausibility. There were Bastide-Grammont, Jausion-Veynac, Victoire Bastide, Jausion's wife, and Françoise Galtier, her widowed sister; besides Colard and Anne Benoît; Bach and Missonnier; Catherine Burgière,

Bancal's wife, and Marianne Bancal, his eldest daughter. . . .

One man only had to be omitted from the list, since for some weeks past he had been beyond the reach of public animosity—this was Bancal himself, who had been carried off by one of the many diseases which were so prevalent in the unhealthy prisons of that epoch.

There were many rumours current about the circumstances of his death, which ranked as an integral part of the whole mystery. No one believed in the medical diagnosis of erysipelas and dropsy, but all were convinced that he had been poisoned by the infusion of copper coins in the vinegar of his salad; possibly this was his punishment for having spared the life of his child who had given testimony against him—a terrible warning to the witnesses for the prosecution and a cause of renewed anger against the prisoners.

The crown prosecutor ceased pacing the room and called to mind that, in the course of the day, some one had sent him an important document concerning Bancal's last moments, an anonymous manuscript, of which several copies had been secretly put into circulation. No doubt this was another lying tale, and he felt undecided as to whether he should trouble about it. But there would be a loud outcry against him if it could be shown that he had ignored it entirely. He would expose himself to all kinds of accusations in a town like this where no one even ventured to have any doubts in the matter, and where there was no discussion as to whether the prisoners were guilty, but only as to what their sentence would be.

M. Fualdès' successor sat down in his leather

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arm-chair and, while the perfume of a dreamy June evening rose gently through the open window, he took a resolute plunge into the nauseating account of Bancal's death-bed. And this is the story which was set out in that remarkable pamphlet.

During the preceding month, as Bancal lay dying, he made up his mind to send for a confessor. One of the cathedral priests, Abbé Brast, hastened to comply with the request, but strange to say he did not come alone. An unknown companion—the writer of the document—slipped in behind him, prepared to take down any information that the secrets of the confessional might yield to him; and it was to this ambiguous personality that the pamphlet owed its inception.

At this point M. Maynier made a grimace expressive of disgust and disbelief, but he continued reading as follows:—

“The face of the dying man (for Bancal had less than twenty-four hours to live) was thin, pale, and unshaven and a brown nightcap was pulled down over his eyes. At first M. Brast tried to speak sternly to him, but how could he be angry with a dying man? He urged Bancal to repent of his sins and spoke to him of God's mercy. I believe the hardened sinner was touched, because he seemed to be wiping away his tears. He repeated several times, ‘Though I had nothing to do with it, I always have the figure of that good man, M. Fualdès, before me. Since the dead know everything, he knows the truth.’ At this point his voice grew weaker and he repeated, ‘It is strange that although I had nothing to do with it, I always have the figure of M. Fualdès before me.’

“After a pause he inquired about his children, especially Victor, who, he said, ‘will be a better man

than his father.' Then with emphatic gestures and raised voice he begged M. Brast very earnestly to go and see his little Magdelaine, who was at the orphanage, and for whom he felt more sorrowful than for any of the others. Then he added, 'Marianne is a good girl.'

"He did not say a word about his wife and, noticing this omission, M. Brast thought it his duty to mention her; but Bancal put aside this reminder, either by keeping silence or by speaking about something else. They could hear the twittering of birds on the roof of the convent near the prison and he said, 'They are singing because they are not in a cell and . . . !' M. Brast added, 'Because they are innocent. God grants to every creature the gift of joy as a reward for his innocence. There was once a time when you too sang as you worked among the vines.'

"Ah! it was not so on the 20th March when my little Magdelaine . . .' He broke off again and then continued in a muffled voice, 'It was not fine on that day.'"

M. Maynier was but faintly interested in the flowery opening of this piece of literature, and he sighed. But, further down, his attention was roused by the following lines:—

"Gradually M. Brast induced him to speak, but, as it was in the nature of a confession, (or at any rate I believed so) I went out into the corridor. M. Brast called me back saying, 'Do not go away.' So I did not go away and, pressing my ear against the half-opened door of the cell, I listened attentively, but what I heard was unimportant, at least as regards details."

"This is a remarkable narrative," argued the crown prosecutor raising his eyes towards the

beamed ceiling. "I am far from doubting Abbé Brast's entire orthodoxy, but, without laying claim to any knowledge of theology, I cannot help thinking that he acted in a very curious manner in allowing a third person to be present on such a serious occasion. I am quite willing to believe that this priest was not receiving the last confession of the dying man, but is it right that anything said in confidence by him should be overheard by a spy who is listening behind a door? And besides, does not the very fact that an ignorant man like Bancal, who does not observe his religion, remained alone so long with a priest, whom he had summoned to his death-bed, amount to the sacrament of confession? Would he have spoken in the same way if the priest's mysterious companion had not been stationed in the corridor? There are many other harassing questions that I cannot attempt to answer for the time being, so I will see what comes next." He went on reading:—

"M. Brast said to him, 'I will not delude you with false hopes; if you live, you will be condemned by your fellow-men because they believe you to be guilty. If you die, you will be condemned by God, because he knows that you are guilty.'"

"Ah!" thought M. Maynier, "what remarkable assertions this priest makes. He might almost be taken for an investigating magistrate."

"Lessen the enormity of your crime by confession, and do not carry with you to the grave the still heavier crime of allowing suspicion and condemnation to fall upon innocent people. Come, do you feel able to reply to a few questions? If you answer them frankly

your soul will feel greatly comforted. Bear in mind the law of God, the welfare of your family, and your own salvation.'"

Your own salvation! M. Maynier was by no means a religious man, still he was somewhat annoyed to find that the worthy Abbé Brast was more bent on knowing the truth about the Fualdès case than on opening the gates of heaven to this poor wretch of a Bancal by means of a real confession. Gradually his look of disapproval became more accentuated.

"The sick man sighed many times but would not speak. M. Brast, who is a kindly man, took his hand, which made Bancal shed tears, and I even think that the worthy priest kissed him. Why not? Is not true charity full of compassion? 'Sit down,' said the prisoner, his voice choked with sobs, 'sit down and listen. I am ready to speak.'"

"Well, whatever M. Brast may have thought about it, the confession does begin here," cried the prosecutor. "There is nothing about the sign of the cross nor the *Confiteor*, but it is the confession all the same. Let me see what it says."

"There have been two causes of all my troubles—my poverty and my wife. A bad wife, many children, and little food do not make a man as honest as he would like to be, and cunning thoughts creep into your mind, take advantage of your weakness and show you how to supply your urgent needs. Through sheer good-nature you become wicked, or rather you do wicked things without wishing it, almost without knowing it, and it is not till the evil is done that you

realise that it is evil. Up to that point you have merely thought that it was necessary and useful, and that it would turn out all right. That is really my case. I am not telling you this in order to be forgiven—it is only a fault that can be forgiven, and I have been guilty of a terrible crime. Yet I am glad to tell you how it began, so that you may not go away with the belief that Père Bancal did evil deliberately.

“It is good to be able to say that, being poor and with a large family, a number of kind people came to our assistance, but only to a small extent, as is the habit of the rich when they concern themselves at all about the poor. For instance, Mme. Fualdès often sent us bread; from time to time M. Constans bestowed on us small gifts of meat; and my wife used to go every two or three days to fetch broken pieces of food from M. Jausion in the City Square. Mme. Jausion is very kind and nicely spoken, but I cannot say the same for M. Jausion, who is sulky and absent-minded; he does not say much, but what he does say is to the point.

“One evening, when my wife was collecting pieces of food for the pigs, he said to her, ‘Mère Bancal, it has been a bad year, hasn’t it? But, with a little cleverness, it could be made into a good one.’

“I was coming back from the vineyard when my wife repeated this remark to me. We thought about it for some time, but were unable to imagine what he meant. Colard came along to borrow a screw-driver and said, ‘Can’t you guess what it is—you would make it a good year by attacking some of those scoundrelly rich folks, and that would lessen the number of the poor.’

“‘But M. Jausion is rich himself,’ said I, ‘so he could not have meant that.’

“‘Who knows?’ said Colard, ‘there is a saying

that wolves do not eat one another, but rich people are worse than wolves.'

"Then Annette, the woman who passes as his wife, came up and said to him, 'Oh, you are always running down the rich—what should we do without them? You will get yourself into trouble.'

"'Into trouble!' cried Baptiste. 'I care for that as little as I do for this old screw-driver. If ever I were in the place of Charlot, the executioner, and a rich man were to come under my axe, you would see how I should relish the job!'

"The next day or the day after, I cannot remember which, I was working at the vines, when that big fellow, Bastide, passed by; he was coming back from Roquette.

"'Well, my man,' he said, 'what about your vineyard, how is it getting on? I shall be wanting to see you one of these days about a matter which will pay you well.'

"'Always at your service,' I replied, 'for you know, sir,' added Bancal apologetically, 'that my wife, although she looks forbidding, is very easy going and that our house——'

"'Leave that out,' interrupted the abbé, 'there are things which every one takes for granted and about which nobody speaks.'"

At this point, M. Maynier could not help smiling. If the abbé had really spoken in this manner, he was extremely tactful. Bancal was often lacking in this quality, but at the same time he displayed a pretty gift for simile which is rare in a bricklayer, even when he cultivates vines, and an amount of smartness which is still more unusual in a dying man. But of the three people the one who surprised the prosecutor the most was the unknown scribe

who had taken down the whole conversation, after declaring at the beginning that he had heard very little, at least as regards details.

So whilst the twilight seemed to linger indefinitely in the peaceful sky, the magistrate went on reading this fantastic tale.

"Some time later, M. Bastide came to my house with a dressmaker named Charlotte Arlabosse, and asked my wife if she had received anything from Mme. Fualdès recently."

"'No later than yesterday,' replied my wife."

"'And is M. Fualdès very generous?'"

"'Middling,' said she."

"'I know how to make him charitable,' returned Bastide. 'Send Marianne to him; he is never able to refuse anything to young girls.'"

"At this they all burst out laughing and Annette, arriving on the scene, joined in and added, 'If I had anything to do with that old owl, I would pluck out every one of his feathers.'"

"Matters remained as they were till 12½ 19th March. In the course of the day, Bastide came down the Rue des Hebdomadiers on horseback, dismounted at Gincesty's and came back to my house about three o'clock and asked for Annette. She was in the wash-house, and on his way there he met her with a bundle of damp linen which, being very polite, he carried for her. They talked together for over an hour and then they parted. He was rubbing his hands together and seemed to be very pleased about something, while she had an uneasy look in her eyes. I pointed this out to my wife."

"At about six o'clock or half-past six, I was coming home carrying my mattock and pick. On turning the corner I ran against Missonnier, and the handle of one of my tools knocked his hat off. As he was

picking it up, I heard him say, 'That is his usual habit—he does not get back till nine o'clock and then he goes to bed at once.'

"He was speaking to Bach, and I asked of whom they were talking.

"'About the beggar who lodges here,' said Bach, 'and as we want to use his stable . . .'

"Missonnier said, 'In an hour's time, if that suits you.'"

At this point the lawyer made a note, for the last statement fitted in very well with a theory greatly favoured by certain people, who had been struck by the unlikelihood of a murder being planned in a house with so many people in it as the Bancals'. So it was believed that a plan had been made to murder M. Fualdès in Missonnier's stable, which was sub-let to a beggar for a lodging; but on that particular evening the beggar must have come in early, and locked himself in so securely, that they had to take the risk and crowd into the notorious kitchen.

"That would explain certain inconsistencies," he said to himself. "And now let me see the third account of the crime."

"Just at that time there were one or two hurdy-gurdy men in the street who deafened us with their noise. I spoke to my wife about it and she went out and threw a handful of potato peelings on their instruments. They were quiet for a minute and then began again more vigorously than before."

"Quite so," remarked M. Maynier. "Some people declare that Bancal's wife, while pretending to throw vegetable peelings at them, which in itself

is absurdly improbable, bribed them with six francs to grind their organ without stopping."

"About a quarter past eight, Colard came very hurriedly into the house; he was pale and looked quite distraught.

"'Good gracious, what is the matter with you?' said my wife.

"'Why are your children not in bed yet?' he cried abruptly.

"My wife said nothing, and I thought the question a very strange one. Suddenly Bach came in and saying hastily, 'Send the children out of the way,' went out again.

"Then Colard said more calmly, 'He wants to have a little private conversation with a lady, and you know——'

"My wife sent the children upstairs to the second floor; Alexis and Victor to the back room, and Magdelaine to the large front room. She was told to sleep in Marianne's bed, as her sister was out at Glanzky. Just at that minute Mariétte came in herself with the son of Lacombe, the shoemaker. Then we all heard a loud noise but at some distance away, probably in the Rue des Frères." "

"Nonsense," exclaimed the lawyer, losing patience, "that is in the opposite direction from M. Fualdès' house."

"... A loud noise during which Lacombe went out with a bucket, I believe to draw some water, but I would not be quite certain about that. Colard went out too and came back in about three minutes. During this short space of time some one knocked at the door, which, however, was ajar.

"My wife said, 'Come in,' and I went towards

the door with a candle. It was a lady wrapped in a shawl and with a black veil over her face. She was trembling a little and my wife asked her to be seated. The lady said, 'Is no one here?'

"'No one,' answered my wife.

"I had shut the front door, or else Colard had forgotten to leave it open when he came in again. The noise in the street grew louder as it came nearer—the shrill sound of a whistle could be heard above the strains of the hurdy-gurdy. Soon the tumult came still nearer, and then some one banged violently against our door. The lady was terrified and jumped up; my wife led her up two steps into the little scullery. Meanwhile I opened the door and Colard held a candle."

The next part of the narrative attributed to the dying Bancal cleverly coincided with Bousquier's tale. The irrepressible dying man also left out the three unknown ladies and the improbable lame man, "who walked in a funny way." The guilty people he mentioned were Bastide, enraged and breathless, Jausion, Bach, Missonnier, Colard, Annette Benoît and the Bancals—not a soul besides. That was the official number, though other witnesses had already doubled or trebled it. The only additions to the original story were a number of fresh details.

To begin with, there was the first mention of some papers being signed. Despite his protests against "this undeserved coercion," M. Fualdès was forced to "write on some long pieces of paper which M. Jausion pulled out of a portfolio one by one and put back again."

"Were these securities, and, if so, what use would they be?" wondered M. Maynier as he read.

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"Were they receipts, and, if so, for what, because Jausion was rich and his victim in very straitened circumstances? Still I had better make a note of it."

M. Fualdès had used an inkstand "into which a little vinegar had to be put."

Then Bancal came to the murder itself.

"When he had finished writing he said, 'Is that all?' and looked round him.

"'After what I have just done you would not spare me—I know you,' said Jausion.

"'And yet you know that I did spare you,' said M. Fualdès, looking at him and sighing.

"'Do you regret it?' cried Jausion indistinctly, between his clenched teeth.

"'Yes,' said Bastide, 'you see perfectly well that he does regret it.'

"'They are all like that,' cried Colard; 'they think they can do anything they like, just because they are rich and powerful.'

"Thereupon there was a long silence, during which we all looked at one another and at M. Fualdès.

"'Come, we must put an end to this,' said Bastide.

"'Give me my hat,' said M. Fualdès.

"'Your hat!' exclaimed Jausion, turning pale.

"Then he struck the poor man twice and pushed him roughly. I had a mind to call out and give the alarm, but my wife prevented me by saying, 'Is it any business of ours? It is their own affair, and we do not know the rights of it.' I thought I was doing the wisest thing in keeping silence, so I did not interfere, but I was much to blame for this.

"Bastide continued to strike M. Fualdès, who struggled and fell crying, 'Bastide! Jausion! Do you mean to murder me?'

"He stumbled against the legs of the table and

shook it, so that a loaf of bread which Mme. Fualdès had sent us rolled off and fell at his feet. I think the poor man must have recognised the bread, because he groaned, raised his eyes to heaven and wept.

" 'Come,' repeated Bastide, 'we must put an end to this.'

" Colard rushed forward, the knife in his hand; Annette held him back crying, 'Baptiste, what are you going to do?' Without answering, he pushed her away and threatened her with the knife. The girl burst out crying and, sitting down in a corner, gasped amidst her sobs, 'What are you going to do, Baptiste?'

" Then they lifted up poor M. Fualdès by his head and feet and laid him at full length on the table. During the struggle he made his shoes fall off, and I found his stockings in my hand, because it was I who was told to hold his feet. I shuddered and trembled and almost wept, but my wife explained to me in a few words that M. Fualdès had been guilty of a serious offence towards these gentlemen, and that, moreover this act of justice was no concern of ours but our fortune depended on it. I am foolish enough to be a weak man, and unfortunately I consented to everything. But when I saw Colard raise the knife, I felt as if I were about to faint and I turned my head away. The good man only uttered one or two short cries, and, as the blood did not flow, Colard struck harder."

It was at this point that the writer introduced (rather too late) Fualdès' request to make his peace with heaven, which Bastide refused. Then followed M. Fualdès' death and the account, interspersed with grim jests, of the reward paid to the murderers.

" *Although I was incapable of taking any share in*

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the murder, I had not sufficient strength of mind to resist sharing in the proceeds of the robbery. My share was a very small one, but I shall always blame myself for taking it. Those who did more evil than I will certainly suffer much more. The poor man's overcoat, frock coat, cravat and waistcoat were taken off . . . —"

"Why did they do that when they had to dress him again afterwards?" was M. Maynier's comment.

"His shoes had come unfastened in the struggle, and his stockings, as I told you, slipped off in my hand. Well, sir, it was those wretched stockings that I wanted. My feet were sore and I thought that, as the stockings were fine woollen ones, they would be comfortable . . . —"

To hold a man who is being done to death in return for a pair of stockings, even fine woollen ones . . . there must have been some hardened sinners in Rodez in the year 1817!

Bancal continued:—

"A few five-franc pieces and some small change were found in his pocket, but I did not want my wife to have the money. But when I took the stockings, she laid claim to the shirt and cravat, which were both very good ones. I fancy Jausion convinced her that the possession of this fine linen might betray us, and persuaded her to be satisfied with a ring instead."

"There was some mention of a key which was found on the body of M. Fualdès," said the abbé, 'but you have not told me anything about it.'

"As regards the key, it was found in a pocket of the trousers and was handed, I think, to Bastide, as they said it would be useful to him. Moreover, Bastide

and Jausion both repeated several times, 'It is not his money we want; he knows that perfectly well, and he knows too that he has only got what he deserved.' Colard confirmed all they said, only more emphatically, and added that he would like to do the same to all those rich scoundrels. And whilst M. Fualdès was bleeding to death, he said mockingly to him, 'It's all up with you, you shan't play the B— any more.' "

What did this mysterious letter stand for? The anonymous writer took care not to make any definite statement on that point, so that the public would be able to say that what Colard meant was, "You shan't play the *Bonapartist* any more." And this, combined with Bastide's and Jausion's statements about the money, went a long way in confirming the theory of a political crime which was held by people in every grade of society, from ministers of the crown down to the last of the extreme revolutionaries living obscurely in the lowest slums of Rodez. M. Maynier himself did not care to finish the word; he thought it more in accordance with the dignity of his office to avoid the substitution of a coarser word, and he did not wish to intensify any further the galling indecision of his own mind.

Bancal's tale dragged on interminably, without throwing any fresh light on the case. All he did was to confirm Magdelaine's stories, taking care to involve Bousquier as little as possible, and to make the description of the disposal of the body coincide with the evidence already given. And all of it was interspersed with details impossible to verify and long drawn out lamentations.

"The blood was collected in a vessel and some of it was afterwards thrown away——"

"And where was it thrown?" queried the lawyer.

" . . . so carelessly that it splashed in the yard and even my shirt was quite stained by it.

"Poor M. Fualdès! I can still see him lying on that table choking . . . As I took no part in the murder, why is it that he appears before me all the time and reproaches me? It is true that I was present, and although I gained nothing from the crime——"

"What about the stockings?" remarked the lawyer contemptuously.

"I gave no orders, but it was done with my connivance and I have been punished as I deserve.

"When it was all over, they had to get rid of the body, and that had not been planned out, because the original idea had been to make an end to M. Fualdès in Missonnier's stable and in quite a different way."

M. Maynier wrote on the margin of the paper: "There would have been a body to dispose of in any case!"

"Why could it not have been arranged differently? Then I should not be dying on a straw mattress in a prison cell. But it was decreed that the beggar should come back an hour earlier than his usual time, and that this horrible deed should take place at my house . . .

"And how were you paid for these degrading and criminal services?" asked M. Brast.

"By a number of promises to myself," replied Bancal; "as for my wife she received . . .——"

"At these words the sick man, exhausted by the tale he had just told . . .—"

"He had good reason to be," groaned the lawyer.

" . . . was seized with convulsions which lasted for twenty minutes and ended in a fainting-fit. When Bancal came to himself, he looked at M. Brast for some time in a dazed way and then pointing at me with a shaking hand (for I had come inside when he fainted) he muttered a few unintelligible words. M. Brast spoke consolingly, asked the jailer to look after him, and went away."

That was the end of this strange document, which reeked of falsehood.

M. Maynier turned over the pages again in silence. Was it likely that a priest of the Roman Catholic Church would have wrested from a dying man all these foolish details about the murder of Fualdès, and have then paid no further heed to him and left him to die that night without giving him absolution? Could these statements be produced at the trial, when not only they lacked any confirmation, but everything tended to show that they must be regarded with grave suspicion?

The darkness of night had fallen, and from the cathedral chimes, repeated by the other churches, the sound of the Angelus floated through the air. An atmosphere of peace stole into the room and for the time the hateful story faded from his mind. The lawyer stood up and went to the window, looking out for a while at the wreaths of smoke rising towards the dark sky.

Could it be that this kindly, peaceful town was at that very moment torn by fierce strife, and that

at each of those quiet hearths hatred and fury were burning? And yet it was so. If he had even been seen by one of his fellow-citizens to shrug his shoulders at this pretended 'confession of Bancal's, he himself would have been considered a traitor.

He wanted to do his duty, and he certainly would do it without any further hesitation, only he must choose his own line of argument. Taking his hat and his stick, he bent his steps towards the abode of M. l'abbé Brast.

At the very moment when the prosecuting authorities were endeavouring to find a less insecure foundation for the accusation concocted by popular imagination; while they were carefully sorting out all the evidence, the possible and improbable, useful and imaginary, established and hypothetical, and endeavouring to formulate from it the narrative of a crime which no one had seen committed, fate was sending a remarkable witness who was henceforward to be the central figure of the entire drama.

In the midst of this tangled story of crime, there appeared a woman, whose name was to become notorious from Gibraltar to Archangel; a woman whom judges and public alike believed to be an eye-witness sent by providence, but who only increased the doubts and difficulties of the inquiry. In short, a woman whose wickedness, duplicity, outbursts of passion, concealments and lying tales made her the most perfect incarnation of a type henceforward associated with the history of this particular investigation and this epic of crime.

The name of this woman was Mme. Clarisse Manzon, and it is a name that will never be forgotten.

CHAPTER VIII

MADAME CLAPISSE MANZON

MARIE FRANÇOISE CLARISSE ENJALRAN was born at Rodez in 1785, and the early years of her childhood must have been very unhappy. The mad fury of the Revolution had dragged her parents from their home and cast them into prison, while she herself grew up in the gloomy château of Perrié, purchased by her father from M. de Bonald, which formed a setting bound to have a romantic influence on a young and impressionable mind.

This old manor house of feudal aspect stood at the head of a lonely chine covered with heather and juniper trees. A little stream made its way just below through lush meadows, while the house was shut in by lofty trees. Far off on the horizon were the mountains of Aubrac and the four bare peaks of the Cantal.

Places react on temperaments in different ways. In the seclusion of this valley and woods the famous author of *Primitive Legislation* worked out the most profound metaphysical and historical problems, and it is probable that the silence, broken only by the sound of flowing water and the murmur of wind in the trees, helped to instil into the child's mind her tortuous and secret thoughts and passionate emotions.

She had practically no teaching in her youth, but passed her time as she liked with her brothers who, however, were soon to leave the family circle.

Later, M. and Mme. Enjalran were allowed to return to their home, and she lavished on her parents, especially on her mother, a wealth of that affection for which she herself felt such a desperate craving. Already it seemed to her that it was for love alone that she existed; it was the one subject that claimed her interest and, of the few books which she devoured secretly, the only ones she cared for were those which had love for their theme.

What was the effect on her of those long days spent in restless expectation, filled with wavering but ardent hopes? Others, indeed many others, would have been dejected and crushed by this narrow, gloomy, and empty existence, but on Clarisse it only had the effect of over-excitement.

Her parents, as it happened, were by no means unaware of her frame of mind, and, imagining that with a disposition like this she might readily fall a victim to the first man who crossed her path, they decided on the usual remedy in such cases—an early marriage.

Their choice fell on a M. Manzon, who came from a small town in the Aveyron district and was eight or nine years older than their daughter. This young man was eminently suitable—he was an officer in the army, one of his brothers was a colleague of M. Enjalran, judge of the Civil Court at Rodez, and a niece had married M. de Séguret, president of the council, so that their information about him was quite complete.

It was perhaps somewhat risky to wed Clarisse to a soldier, since at that time men of his profession were not very much at home, but she had already shown a strong liking for a uniform. At Rodez she had become very friendly with “a young cavalry officer, brisk, nimble and flippant, very cheerful

and with plenty to say for himself, an inveterate tease and full of whims," whom she nicknamed *Klein-King*.

It was expected that her marriage would put an end to this youthful attachment, which she artlessly confessed to M. Manzoni, but it soon became evident that the hope was not to be realised.

Her husband was in an infantry regiment ; and although the "little cavalryman" went to fight in distant lands, was taken prisoner by the English and imprisoned in the island of Malta, Clarisse persistently kept alive her memories of the light cavalry.

Her husband suspected this, and was not sorry when, after three months of matrimony, he himself was sent to take part in the Spanish War. It is noteworthy that his Christian name was Mark Antony, and it was doubtless by reason of his war-like appellation that he found fighting more congenial than writing sonnets to his lady.

It cannot be said that his wife felt any regret for his absence, having already confided to her friends that she had taken him "as if he had been a pill," and that she had found him unbearable, and was bored to death in his society ; and besides that, she could not even respect him, as he had insisted on marrying her when he knew all the time that her heart belonged to another. If in these circumstances he would marry her, he must put up with the consequences, and "he certainly was not lacking in courage, even if he were deficient in delicacy." It is therefore not particularly surprising that she wrote to him in these terms :—

" You have behaved abominably to me, but perhaps by your very tyranny you have done me a good

turn and shown me the way to freedom. You need not fear, however, that I shall make any misuse of it, not out of consideration for you, but to preserve my own self-respect. I allow myself the luxury of telling you the truth—it is a dainty morsel for a slave to be able to speak freely to her master. . . .”

Left to her own devices, let us see what use this young woman made of her liberty. She did not like Rodez at all ; in her eyes it was a town in which all the inhabitants were soulless automatons or machines, and totally uncongenial to her. On the other hand, the town regarded her with suspicion, and it did not take long for her to acquire a somewhat doubtful reputation.

Later on, the unwelcome news was received that Mark Antony was on his way back from Spain, and Mme. Enjalran had to use every argument in her power before she could induce Clarisse to live with her husband again.

“ Very well, I agree to do so,” wrote her daughter, “ provided he is not ill and that he will leave me to myself. Let him spare me his clumsy endearments.” And it was with unfeigned reluctance that she consented to endure the society of a husband whom she regarded “ indifferently in the morning and resignedly at night ! ”

It will readily be understood that a reconciliation brought about in such a manner and subject to so many conditions was hardly likely to be a lasting one, and, after only a few days, the young wife could stand it no longer and went off to her mother’s house. Mark Antony was foolish enough to go to the extreme measure of obtaining a legal order to enforce her return to him. She refused to obey the order, and her husband declared his intention

of leaving the neighbourhood and going to Cahors. As a matter of fact, he did not go away at all. He was bent on having his own way, and had evolved a scheme for winning the affections of this romantic lady, with whom he was still infatuated.

It was soon discovered that, instead of going to Cahors, he had taken up his quarters at a neighbouring farm where he was living a very retired life. It may have chanced that he found in this rustic retreat some young peasant girl of greater attractions and less indifferent to him than his eccentric better-half. Whether this were the case or not, it served his purpose better than all the campaigns he had fought.

What happened was that Clarisse, hiding in the recesses of her lonely château, found herself the heroine of a romantic love episode. At night, beneath her high window, she heard the thrumming of a mandoline; in the morning, she found bunches of fresh-gathered flowers on her window-sill. Freed from the tiresome commonplace affection of her husband, her heart was captured by the unknown lover whose presence she only divined in the darkness.

Soon, tied to the bouquets, there appeared perfumed love letters of which the writing was familiar to her, but not the style. Sometimes the letters were brought by carrier pigeons, and these were varied by offerings of be-ribboned baskets containing such trifles as a cashmere shawl or a point lace veil.

How was it possible to resist a suitor who wooed in such romantic fashion! No doubt she had recognised the handwriting and, though the letters were all merely signed with the Christian name of Antony, she was easily able to pierce through the thin veil of the disguise. This time her husband

had adopted the right method to win her favour, but whereas he hoped to enjoy in comfort the fruits of his conquest, her one idea was to go on playing the comedy indefinitely.

She would continue to resist the claims of a husband who not long since had dared to assert his legal rights, but she would grant her secret favours to the masked adorer who sent his love letters on the wings of doves. So he had to go on playing his part, and flavour the monotonous fare of matrimony with the spice of forbidden fruit, otherwise the comedy would lose all its interest for her.

So poor M. Manzon was forced to show his devotion by dint of the most painful and unwonted exertions. At the risk of catching cold, breaking his neck, or being bitten in the calf by watch-dogs, he had to swarm up a rope ladder (possibly even a silk one) late at night, and climb in at a window, when he could have so easily walked in at the door. Once inside, he would be led into a secluded arbour provided with a most uncomfortable sofa instead of the soft bed for which he longed, and before daybreak he would be forced to make a hasty exit and, shivering with cold, return to his farm to try to get a little rest. The worthy man, who wanted nothing better than his hot drink and his nightcap, through his own vanity had become entangled in a comedy which he could not hope to bring to an end except by stripping from it the glamour of poetry for ever.

This went on for over a month. M. Manzon, quite realising that on the day he ceased to be his wife's lover he would lose all influence over her, held out manfully, while Clarisse, delighted at tricking her parents and her household, ended by finding Antony

much to her liking. But the affair ended as might have been foreseen. The husband, romantic by necessity, and the wife by choice, were unmasked, and M. Enjalran, who had no sense of humour, thought them absolutely ridiculous.

Considering all the circumstances, M. Manzoni now thought that the time had come when it would be safe to return to a more ordinary mode of life, but he was mistaken, as he soon found out. He was snubbed by his parents-in-law and forsaken by his wife, who only vouchsafed him a few last signs of affection when she met him in the woods on her way to the village to carry out, so she said, her religious duties. Having lost in her eyes all his attraction, his charm, and his poetry when he gave up his rope ladder and mandoline, Mark Antony once and for all abandoned any desire to live with a woman so exacting over trifles, and decided that their temperaments were incompatible.

Clarisse considered that the sentence from *Corinne* applied to herself: "The common herd regards as folly the longing of a soul for more space, ardour, and hope than are obtainable in this world," whereas M. Manzoni had never even read *Corinne*. So he shrugged his shoulders, went away and, obtaining a post as collector of taxes in a neighbouring community, left his wife for good to behave as she pleased.

She seems to have done so. Being dependent on a meagre pension, and that not punctually paid, cast off by her father and separated from her husband, she simply sought other protectors. In a town like Rodez, where her rivals were not many, she soon made numerous conquests, which she consistently and rapidly put aside in order to make fresh ones.

No one has ventured to say she was pretty, and her enemies declared she had a copper-coloured skin, small eyes, a wide mouth and a harsh voice ; but if the truth must be told, she was well-formed, with a good figure, an easy carriage, and a face whose charm consisted in its remarkable animation. You might call her commonplace, baffling and changeable if you liked, but it was seldom that she failed to attract.

In July, 1817, she had bestowed her fickle affections on one of General de Vautré's aides-de-camp, named Clémantot, who must have had some attraction for her but could certainly not be called a good-looking man. He was not very tall and had already become bald, his voice had a nasal twang and he was *beffi*, as they said in Rodez, which meant that his lower jaw was too prominent. Clarisse sometimes went to the theatre, to the great scandal of the good people in the town, and it was there that she had attracted his attention. Soon afterwards, he called at her house and was introduced to her by her own brother, Edward Enjalran, a young man of thirty, who had already had a remarkable career. He had formerly been an adjutant-major, had escaped by a miracle from the icy plain of Beresina, had passed from the mountains of Spain to the steppes of Russia, and from a raft on the Niemen to the defeat at Leipzig. Returning to a life of peace, this adventurous young man tried to kill time by riding the horse which had carried him from Wagram to Dresden, making easy love to shop-girls and uttering volleys of oaths.

About this time, his lady love was a young girl named Mlle. Rose Pierret, the daughter of a police officer, and worthy of description in some detail.

She had blue eyes, a little turned-up nose, dewy mouth with dazzling white teeth, and a plump well-rounded figure. She was often to be seen leaning from the first floor window of the house where she was living (the property of a well-known botanist) with a little bonnet perched jauntily on her head and a yellow shawl draped over her shoulders. She was of quite a different type from Mme. Manzoni and blushed like a rose on the slightest provocation. Her great charm, and one which is unfortunately too rare, consisted in looking delightful and saying nothing.

Edward Enjalran, Rose, and Clarisse often went out together, and, as was only natural, Clémendot joined in to make a fourth. As, however, he suffered from corns, and the soldier who had escaped from Beresina had frost-bitten feet, they shared a carriage and often went out to supper somewhere in the outskirts of the town, either at Espalion or perhaps at some wayside inn. At the latter they often had but poor fare, as the innkeeper could give them nothing on fast days except eggs, cheese, and salad. Still, that was no check on their pleasure and, though they kept the sixth commandment of the Church, they did not feel themselves bound to respect any of the others.

There was nothing remarkable about this, and these characters, who deserved at most a place in one of Paul de Kock's novels, would have no claim to be remembered by posterity, if it were not that the irony of fate had destined them to play a part in a great and gloomy judicial drama, and, while they were humming some drinking chorus, the three knocks were struck and they were called on the stage.

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The 28th July was a day of stifling heat. In the evening a large party had been entertained at supper by General de Vautré, who, in consequence of the circumstances that have been previously narrated, was going to leave Rodez almost immediately. Clémendot had been one of the guests, and, as was his usual custom, had supped not wisely but too well. When at length he took his departure and was walking somewhat unsteadily through the streets, it occurred to him that he would go and pay his respects to his dear Clarisse.

He did not meet with a very cordial reception, as the lady did not care for a noisy visitor so late, and, moreover, she had been feeling rather annoyed the last few days at the attentions which the aide-de-camp had been paying to Rose Pierret. She thought that the deceitful maiden was minded to take away her *beffi*. Her vanity was wounded and she tried to think of some subterfuge to ensure her lover's fidelity. She fell back on those well-worn means which all women employ at some time or other, namely to find some imaginary pretext for a quarrel in order, as they suppose, to prevent their lover's affection from dying of inanition. So that hot and languorous July night was spent in a succession of disputes and reconciliations, all of the most trivial and foolish kind.

At last Clémendot dropped off to sleep, lying on his back with his mouth open, while Clarisse, still wakeful, propped her head on her arm and looked at him. A large moth had flown in through the half-opened casement and was fluttering its wings drowsily round the flame of the night-light.

The soldier suddenly started up, just awakened by a nightmare dream about the Fualdès case.

"We talked too much at dinner to-night about

this notorious case which is to open in a fortnight," he said, speaking thickly. "Amazing details have been given about the murder, and everybody already knows them. For instance, there was some woman concealed in Bancal's house while the poor man was being done to death. Some people say that it was Mlle. Avit, the daughter of the clerk of the court, others declare it was Miss Gipson, the Englishwoman, wearing her famous green-feathered hat, and that little Magdelaine recognised the feathers. Others again say . . ."

He paused, and Clarisse laughed in a strange way.

"Mlle. Avit and Miss Gipson," she said, "most certainly would have refused to be seen in such a place. Besides, the whole story is absurd—of course the murderers would not have allowed any witnesses there."

At this point Clémendot stared fixedly at Clarisse, as he recalled some other suggestion that had been made.

"No, no," he answered, speaking with some reluctance. "You are right, it was neither of those I just mentioned—but several people asserted you were there."

"I was there?" said she.

"Yes, you unhappy woman, and that you had an appointment to meet some man there," he retorted, his eyes glittering with rage.

"The next thing you will say, I suppose," she replied calmly, "is that I had some share in the crime."

But Clémendot appeared not to be listening to her and continued, as if obsessed by this new idea: "It has also been said that on your arrival at the house, Bancal's wife, thinking she heard people

coming, hid you in some place from which you could see and hear everything that was happening."

As she continued to look at him steadily, endeavouring to plumb the depths of his gloomy and suspicious thoughts, he cried out in a frenzy of anger, "You *were* there, you wretched woman! Confess you were there."

Mme. Clarisse Manzon bore this 'unexpected attack without blenching and replied coolly, "Certainly I was."

As always happens in such a case, the drunkard was disconcerted by this calm reply. He raised his arm as if to strike her, then he burst into tears. "My poor child," he cried, "how you must have suffered! I understand what happened—Bastide threatened to kill you and Jausion saved your life. Clarisse, Clarisse," he continued in a low voice shaken by sobs, "if you only knew. It was not you of whom they spoke—another name was given, Rose's name, but I guessed rightly. I knew that there was this terrible secret in your life."

Overcome by his drunken emotions he clasped her in his arms and began to sing, and she had to wheedle him into silence so as not to awaken the neighbours. He did not mind her shameless assignation with another man or a new infidelity, designed but not carried out. The woman whom he clasped in his arms was not merely the fickle wife of a collector of taxes. Far more than that—she was the spirit of crime incarnate, the veiled heroine whose identity had been sought by every one for months past. And so, while the great moth singed its wings badly and made the night-light splutter, the foolish man, enamoured of the part he hoped to play, was happy again—for the last time.

The next morning, Clémidot was unable to restrain himself from dropping a few compromising phrases on the subject of the unknown woman, both at the hotel where he was lodging and at the Café Coc, which was the officers' usual meeting-place.

"Oh! I know these disguised women—it wasn't so-and-so, nor yet so-and-so; I am the only one who knows. . . ."

He was implored to speak, but he relapsed into dignified silence. However, the news had already spread through the town and, before the afternoon was over, Clémidot was summoned to appear before the prefect, the Comte d'Estourmel, who was by no means indifferent to a crime which was causing such agitation in the district. He had decided that he would not exercise his authority independently, but would come to the help of the judicial authorities whom he had urged to decisive action ever since the murder had taken place. He was anxious to show the populace that the government would not hesitate to avenge the death of Fualdès, and, consequently, he immediately grasped the importance of the information which had been brought to him.

After listening to Clémidot's boastful statements, the prefect was quite convinced that Mme. Manzoni must undoubtedly be the unknown heroine whom public opinion demanded, and he determined to make her confess.

This was by no means easy, and when, a couple of days later, Clarisse appeared before the Comte d'Estourmel, she denied everything, and even went so far in her denial as to declare that she was hardly acquainted with this Clémidot who had talked so freely. This preliminary skirmish did not discourage the prefect, because in the meantime other

events were taking place. For instance, there was the intervention of M. Enjalran, whose handsome presence enabled him to play the part of the heavy father in the drama to perfection, and who was firmly convinced that his erring daughter could find no better opportunity of shaking off the discredit of her past life than by furthering the cause of justice. And who was better fitted to force her to do so than himself, the president of that court of martial law which had taken such a leading part in the inquiry?

On the other hand, the brothers, Gustave and Edward Enjalran, particularly the latter, were so enraged with Clémendot, either because he had compromised their sister or for a more secret reason, that they were bent on nothing less than challenging him to a duel. Matters were in this unsatisfactory state when, on the 1st August, Clarisse started writing a series of incoherent letters, the first of which, couched in the most extravagant terms, was addressed to the Comte d'Estourmel:—

"I believe that you take a keen interest in M. Clémendot and, in consideration of this fact, combined with my fear lest another murder should occur, I feel compelled to take this opportunity of disclosing to you a secret hitherto jealously guarded from every one. Yesterday this was impossible for me—my state of mind was indescribable. It was in vain that I tried to conceal from you how terrible is the burden on my conscience. I will tell you the truth, but will you deign to believe me? May I depend on your secrecy? It is very difficult for me, for is not the statement which I signed already in the hands of the judges? I know not what my fate may be, but the lives of my brothers will no longer be imperilled. My father need

not fear lest his position be endangered, and, if I am able to uphold the honour of a brave officer, what does it matter if that of a mere woman is lost? All the blame will fall on me and I am prepared for any eventuality. What more can happen to me—I am destined to unhappiness, and for a long time past I have been overwhelmed by my misfortunes.

“ Since M. Clémendot desires to have an interview with me I am willing, provided you will allow it to be in your presence alone, and that I may speak to you afterwards without any witnesses. May heaven grant me the strength to speak and cause you to believe me—though I hardly expect it. At least I shall have no one’s death on my conscience; it is my life alone that may be in danger. Kindly let me know at what time I may appear before you. I venture to hope that my letter may not be seen by any one but yourself. Forgive my confused words and accept my respectful apologies.

“ Believe me to remain,

*“ Your very humble and obedient servant,
“ ENJALRAN-MANZON.”*

A few hours later, in the formal setting of the prefect’s office, a strange comedy was played. As the letter had almost promised the confession so ardently desired, no time had been wasted in arranging the interview. But when it came to the point, Clarisse would only confess one single thing and that was that she had only intended to mislead Clémendot by an idle tale invented on the spot. So that the officer was not a liar but merely a simpleton. Then he himself appeared, looking paler than ever, and a duel of wits began between them.

“ Yes,” said Clarisse, “ I told you all those lies on the evening of the 28th July.”

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"In the night, madame, in the night," was the accurate reply, and that was the only shade of difference between the two versions.

Seated at his tall Louis XVI. writing-table, M. d'Estourmel looked on this opening with annoyed surprise. Then he rang a bell and Clarisse's father, M. Enjalran, was shown in. From this point the dialogue was in a loftier vein.

"What is this?" said he to his daughter. "Can you disgrace your family by refusing to the law the confession that is expected of you?"

He himself had no doubts on the matter, and, in his official capacity as magistrate, he was himself a victim to that mania of always being certain of his facts, which has sealed the fate of so many victims.

"Father," replied Clarisse in a firm voice, "I only jested with M. Clémandot—I have never in my life been inside the Bancals' house."

At this, the president of the military court could not restrain his anger: "Whom can you convince," he cried, "that you could jest on such a matter? Who would believe you?"

She tried in vain to force the old man, whose perception was so limited, to understand why she had acted in such a way.

"You are a thoroughly bad woman," he said. "I will seek an interview with the king and get an order to imprison you for the remainder of your life. You will bid a last farewell to your country and your child!"

"My dear father, *lettres de cachet* have long been abolished."

"You shall perish on the scaffold."

"Well, then, if I perish I perish. I shall die without remorse and free from any stain of crime."

Following well-tried methods, M. Enjalran next burst into tears.

"My unfortunate child," he sobbed, "does your family count for nothing? Your father, who has never swerved from the path of honour and who sought to train you in the same way, is compelled by you to live in shame and his last days are embittered. You are thrusting a dagger into your mother's heart—she lies at the point of death, scarce drawing breath. Your brothers are sunk in the depths of despair, and what a terrible inheritance you are bequeathing to your son."

At a sign from the prefect, Clémendot had slipped away while M. Enjalran continued to pour out his pathetic appeals. Changing to a different key, he threatened Clarisse to take away her son, whom she called her "little Allah," to stop her allowance and thus force her to go and live at Perrié, which she would dread more than the scaffold.

But still she maintained an obstinate silence, so finally, thoroughly exasperated, he went away banging the door behind him. They heard him depart and Madame Manzon raised her head—she seemed dazed. She could not understand this insistence about herself, since, like every one else in the town, she firmly believed that the prisoners were all guilty without the shadow of a doubt. She raised her dark eyes to the Comte d'Estourmel and he looked searchingly at her.

"Why is it, M. le Préfet," said she, "that my evidence is needed? It is of no use, and enough is already known about the whole affair. I heard nothing and saw nothing—I recognised no one. . . ."

Her questioner was a clever man who knew how to proceed tactfully with women, so he endeavoured to reassure Clarisse.

"Your child shall not be taken from you," he said to her, "and you shall be provided with sufficient means for your support, and in return for this you can do a great service to the cause of justice. The whole town is convinced that you were at the Bancals' house on the 19th March. If you persist in denying this it may go hard with you."

"Very well," she said, "but it must be quite understood that I shall not denounce any one."

"Of course not—you can only say what you know."

That same evening a small group of people walked in silence down the Rue des Hebdomadiers. First came the prefect with Mme. Manzon leaning on his arm and trembling, despite the oppressive heat of the night. Behind them walked M. Enjalran with one of the judges, and a clerk carrying a lantern. They all passed through the narrow byway, and, as they went, vivid streaks of lightning flashed across the cloudy sky and for a second sharply outlined the gloomy scene. In silence they arrived at the Bancals' house, and ten o'clock was just striking when they entered the deserted kitchen. The bed, with the closed curtains and the large table of evil repute, still stood in their places, and the lantern held by the clerk cast their shadows on the walls. With pallid faces all the others looked fixedly at Clarisse, who wrung her hands, trembled, and then fell down in a swoon. From that moment every one was convinced that she must have been an eye-witness of the crime.

When at last Clarisse revived, all she could say over and over again was, "Let us go away from this place I beg of you—take me away. I shall die if

I stay here." But the others were obdurate. They made her go into each room on the ground floor, and she managed to do everything that was required of her.

Still her torture was not over. The next morning she was again questioned, and M. d'Estournel, who had undertaken this particular investigation, in his eagerness forgot even to eat or drink. He dismissed M. Enjalran and Judge Julien, his companions on the nocturnal expedition which had produced such good results, and from nine o'clock in the morning till five o'clock in the afternoon he questioned his victim without any interval for food, using in turn arguments, threats, appeals, and promises.

"It is quite understood that you implicate no one," he would say, "but were you not at the Bancals' house on the evening of the 19th March? That is the only thing I am asking you."

As a result of this persistent examination, conducted in the large closed room into which poured the oppressive August heat, a new story was evolved even more amazing than the others. It embodied and corresponded more or less to little Magdelaine's biting tale, together with Bancal's incoherent last utterances taken down in shorthand.

It amounted to this: Walking down the Rue des Hebdomadiers on the 19th March, Clarisse Manzoni heard several people approaching. In order to avoid them, she turned at haphazard into the lobby of the Bancals' house, where a man suddenly emerged, caught hold of her and carried her into the little ante-room, where she remained in a fainting condition. When she recovered, she heard a noise close by but could not make out what it was—then followed a quarter of an hour's silence. She tried

to make her way out but only struck her head violently. A man came into the room and took her through the kitchen, "in which all she could distinguish was a faint light," and dragged her to the City Square. She had seen nothing, and did not even know who the man was. All he said to her was, "If you say a single word you shall die," which was quite unnecessary as she knew nothing. Although the time was then about nine or ten o'clock in the evening, she did not go home but to the abode of an old servant of her mother's, named Victoire Redoulez. She knocked at the door but Victoire did not hear, which was very annoying. Then she had the bright idea of going down the Rue de l'Ambergue and hiding beneath the staircase of a deserted convent. She could not find a better place, and there she was again discovered by the mysterious man, who said to her: "Is it true that you do not know me?"

"No, I do not."

"But I know you very well indeed."

"It is quite possible; many people whom I do not know may know me by sight."

"We have both had a lucky escape. I had gone into the house to see a girl, but I was not one of the murderers. When I caught hold of you and saw that you were a woman, I felt sorry for you and rescued you from danger. What were you doing in that house?"

"I had seen some one go in whom I thought I recognised, and I wanted to make sure." (She was already changing her version of the affair, but that did not matter to her.)

"Are you quite sure that you do not know me?" the man was supposed to have said. "If you utter a single word about this business, swear

that you will never speak of me. It was not so dark in the square as it is here ; would you recognise me if you were to see me in broad daylight ? ”

“ No, certainly not. ”

The two then sat together in silence beneath the staircase of the convent during the time that M. Fualdès' body was being carried away. About half an hour had elapsed when the unknown man said to Clarisse :—

“ You are not to return to your home till daylight, nor to follow me. ”

“ I have no wish to, ” she replied.

And the statement ended as follows :—

“ At daybreak I reached my home and went to bed ; no one knew that I had spent the night outside. A few hours later the news of the murder spread through the town, and I felt so terrified that, for a long time afterwards, I had a little girl to sleep in my room. ”

Mme. Manzoni signed this farrago of nonsense and then, declaring she was quite worn out, asked if she might go home and have a little rest. But they had not finished with her yet.

Among the romantic details that had been inserted into the official report during the investigation, was the belief by certain people that the notorious lady of the ante-chamber had been dressed in man's clothes, and that was probably the reason why Bousquier had not mentioned her. Great importance was attached to this disguise, which added another feature to the melodrama. Would Clarisse have any objection to confirming this statement ? By no means—it would do no harm to any one, and so she even described her costume to the prefect. She wore a jacket, which she still had in her possession, and trousers which

she no longer had. Why not? Because she had burnt them. Had she done this because of bloodstains on them? Yes, she had struck herself against a window-latch and her nose had bled. She was very subject to nose-bleeding, and her trousers had become stained by it. Later she had noticed this and so, under the staircase, she had changed into woman's attire again, "which was quite easy as she had kept her dress on under her male garb."

It may be imagined that the prefect jibbed at this highly improbable narrative, especially at these last absurd and incredible details about her change of costume. A male character in one of Molière's comedies can easily disguise himself as a woman, and it is but the work of a moment to slip off his farthingale and skirt, and reappear in his own suit and striped stockings, but it is quite another matter to conceal a skirt beneath complete male attire. And moreover, what could have been the object of this fantastic transformation?

The prefect paid no attention to all this, and the only point on which he made any further inquiry was the bloodstains.

"Come," he said, "let us have the whole truth, since you have come so near it, and speak quite candidly. Did you not go into the room while they were putting an end to the unfortunate man's life? Did not your garments brush against the body of the victim?"

But he had gone too far with this question and Mme. Manzon realised that she was in danger. Like a wild animal brought to bay, she uttered a cry of anguish. "Oh, sir, you are trying to make people believe that I was an accomplice," and she drew back, shunned further questioning, and refused to listen to anything more; all that she would

promise was that she would repeat in court the declaration that she had just signed. She would add nothing further, and when at last released from the ordeal she went away quite overcome and almost delirious. At the door of the prefecture another mob was waiting, consisting of the families, friends, and defenders of the prisoners, all of whom were in a terrible state at the intervention of such a formidable witness as this hysterical woman.

Throughout the whole night she had to listen to the frenzied appeals of Maître Arsaud, Mme. Pons, and Bessières-Veynac, who subjected her to an even more violent attack than she had endured before.

"Unhappy woman," they cried, "do you not feel the terrible responsibility you have incurred, by pretending to be the only outside witness of a tragedy which up to now has depended solely on circumstantial evidence? There is no one else who can convict Bastide and Jausion, and you are the only witness who may be the means of bringing them to the scaffold."

The day of the trial was now close at hand, and this rendered the discussion even more feverish. The time was short for the accused as well as for the accusers, and irresistibly all the actors in the tragedy were being dragged in a dizzy course towards their death.

On the morning of the 3rd August, Mme. Manzoni was again brought into the prefecture. With her face all distorted and disfigured by terror, she entered M. d'Estourmel's office and, handing him a letter, said in a stifled voice, "M. le Préfet, you must not pay the slightest attention to the statement I made yesterday. I have never set foot inside the Bancals' house, with the exception of that

terrible visit there the day before yesterday. I lied to M. Clémandot."

The Comte d'Estourmel, although taken aback, gave no sign of his disappointment, but began to read the fresh statement drawn up by his visitor.

Rodez, August 3rd, 1817.

"Sir,—I am unworthy of your kindness; give me up to my unhappy fate and suffer all the weight of your anger to fall upon me. I am nearly beside myself already, and you will drive me to insanity. I had wished to throw myself at the feet of the High Judge (she meant the presiding judge at the assizes) and confess everything to him, but it is to you, to you only, that I will speak . . . But be gentle with me and pray, in heaven's name, treat me mercifully. Forget the painful episodes of the last three days of which I have been the cause. Remember the difficulty you had in dragging from me what you called the truth, and recall all the circumstance which led up to my supposed confession, and the many threats which were held over me. Do you really think that my statement bears any relation to the truth, though I was obliged to make it? If you insist, and if my father believes that his honour is absolutely at stake in this matter, I will uphold my deposition at any possible risk to my life, and if it is in danger, and that seems quite likely, believe me, I am not afraid. I have thought over and duly weighed every circumstance. Truly it is a horrible thing to perjure oneself, and this consideration might serve me as an excuse, besides the fear of bringing dishonour on my father and depriving me of my son. Advise me, sir, and do not drive me to despair. I will do anything, yes anything, for you, whose kindness has filled me with the warmest gratitude and the wish to make myself

worthy of it, and I will do all I can for a father who has never been just to me. I repeat, I will carry out the wishes of both of you. . . .”

But she did not carry out the wishes of either of them, and the tool they were using was shattered in their hands. It was all in vain that M. d’Estourmel began again alternately to threaten and encourage her. He could get nothing out of her. He promised that he would hold the shield of justice before her, but she remained as immovable as marble.

The next day’s interview only made the position worse. Clarisse appeared at the prefecture before a strange tribunal, the composition of which was contrary to every rule of precedent, and consisted of the prefect, the counsel for the crown, M. Enjalran, M. Julien, and the deputy chief of police. She held stubbornly to her denial of the previous day and later handed them this sworn affidavit :—

“ I declare that my first statement (the one she had afterwards denied) is the only one which is to be believed. All the confessions I have made were extorted from me by violence or by the fear of causing fresh murders. I have been subjected to threats from every side. On the one hand, there is the fear of seeing my brothers involved in a quarrel with M. Clémendot, with the inevitable result that one or the other must perish. On the other hand, I am threatened with a royal decree of exile from my country which would deprive me for ever of my child, the only treasure that is left to me. I am without any means of subsistence, and my father weeps and tells me that his honour depends on my confession. And to crown all, in the

middle of the night I am taken to a place of horror. Conclusions are drawn from the effect produced on me by the sight, and I am most cruelly informed that I am to be placed in solitary confinement if I do not speak. . . .

"Come," said M. d'Estourmel, breaking off from his reading, "confess that all this was dictated to you. Besides, we can tell perfectly well that it was, because it is totally unlike your previous letters."

Clarisse made no reply.

The statement continued as follows :—

"I assert again, in the face of any punishment to me or my family, that I deny absolutely that I was in the Bancals' house either on the 19th March, the day of M. Fualdès' murder, or on any day preceding that crime. I did not even know where the house was or even of its existence. I most sincerely hope that the criminals may be punished, and if I knew them, and if it were in my power to throw any light on the matter, no considerations would deter me from doing so. But, as on the 19th March, at six o'clock in the evening, I was at the house of M. Pal in the Rue Neuve, and did not leave there till the 20th inst., at nine o'clock in the morning, even if M. Clémandot were to fight with my brothers and my whole family were to perish, I could never swear to a false statement which would dishonour it for ever. I am determined to submit to my fate and to trust that the truth will be revealed. Meanwhile I maintain the truth of my first statement, and will abide by it at the inquiry and for the rest of my life.

"(Signed) ENJALRAN-MANZON."

Ah! Clarisse, Clarisse, will you really not

forget this statement of the 4th August, 1817? In truth, you will contradict it many times in the days to come, and you will not abide by it, as you declare, for the rest of your life. But it is the one which will remain longest in your wavering mind, and will be pronounced by your parched lips at the hour of your death.'

When scarce thirteen years have sped, you will be lying on your death-bed in that great city of Paris, which has so quickly grown indifferent to your notoriety in the past. No longer will you be surrounded by judges, eager to uphold their own infallibility, but there will be at your side only a priest, a poor woman, and your son, and in their presence you will speak naught but the truth.

You will no longer play the various fantastic parts which it pleased you to assume in the past. On the verge of the grave you will put aside all disguise, strip off the tinsel, and make an end to pretence. You will turn for consolation to the Abbé de Villers, who will administer the last sacrament to you, and you will beg him to listen to your dying confession. In that same voice which once created so great a sensation in the courts of justice, but which now is so feeble and faint, you will say to your little Allah, who has been hastily summoned from school at Versailles:—

"My son, now that I am about to appear before God, I implore you to lead a virtuous life, and if ever my name is mentioned in connection with the death of M. Fualdès, you may tell every one that I never went inside the Bancals' house, and that I knew and saw nothing of the murder that is believed to have been committed there."

Then, when amidst his sobs the youth has promised you that he will always remember and

will carry out your instructions, you will turn to your landlady and, pressing her hand, you will add this :—

“ No, I was not a witness of that crime, and if it is ever discussed in your hearing, say that in that dread hour when I had to appear before my Maker I gave you my assurance that I never set foot in the Bancals’ house, and that I was entirely ignorant of the manner in which the murder of Fualdès was carried out.”

You talked and wrote a great deal, Clarisse, but in spite of it all, your last statement carries with it a conviction which cannot be distrusted. It corresponds to Bousquier’s confession and to that of other witnesses in this drama, all of whom were afraid to appear with a lie on their conscience before that Judge who alone knows the truth.

This last declaration of Clarisse must be kept constantly before our eyes and in our minds . . . But before she makes it, there are many lies to be told and much innocent blood to be shed.

In those early days of August 1817, Mme. Manzoni’s position was an extremely delicate one. From the outset, public opinion was convinced that she knew everything. She was regarded as the eye-witness so ardently desired and now produced in strange fashion by divine justice. It was M. Clémendot’s friend who held in her hands the key of the mystery—the circumstances were as dramatic, romantic, and poetic as could possibly have been desired.

Why then did she refuse to speak? Because, in the first place, she had been made to swear a most solemn oath on the dead body of Fualdès that she would reveal nothing of what she had seen—if she broke her promise her fate would be

certain death. In the next place, because one of the murderers, touched with compassion, had saved her life. This had been casually mentioned by little Magdelaine, and haltingly confirmed by Père Bancal. Thus Mme. Manzoni was restrained from speaking both by terror and pity, and this roused every one's interest. She was thought to be surrounded by secret intrigues; the friends of the prisoners watched her narrowly and menaced her with continual threats, hoping to be successful in stifling her voice. Departing from their usual austerity, the people of Rodez began to turn a more indulgent eye on Clarisse's career and to follow with absorbed interest every incident in the drama of which the opening scenes were purely their own invention.

As a matter of fact a drama was being enacted, but of quite a different kind. The prefect, extremely angry at the change of attitude on the part of a witness on whom he had counted so much, treated her very harshly. "You have wearied our patience and proved yourself unworthy of our trust in you," he told her. And it was in vain that the terrified woman sought to appease him. He would say nothing more conciliatory than, "If you persist in your denial, an abyss of shame and misery will open beneath your feet."

When she returned home, she was subjected to further exhortations and threats from her father, who was deeply concerned for the honour of the military court over which he presided. Her brothers harassed her in various ways and were joined by her cousin, Amans Rodat, who cared little for the reasons which had brought her into the Bancals' house, so long as she could testify to the presence of Bastide and Jausion there.

"*Felix culpa!*" (a fortunate crime) he called it, in the tone of a man well versed in the Holy Scriptures. Besides these, she was importuned by neighbours, friends and casual acquaintances, all suddenly obsessed by the mystery. They impressed on Clarisse in every conceivable way that not three, but only one unknown woman had been present at Fualdès' death—that was absolutely certain, for everybody had seen her—and that she was ruining herself by persisting in her denial.

Then she had recourse to another expedient, and wrote again to M. d'Estourmel:—

"Sir,—I had come to a decision and was on the point of confiding in you—but what security am I to have? Nevertheless I will tell you everything to-morrow, if you will be responsible above all for secrecy. You will see that my statement was both true and false; I never went to the Bancals, and yet I am supposed to have gone there. Heaven have mercy on me . . . !"

If a woman had by any chance been seen at the Bancals, possibly she might have been mistaken for me—so ran Clarisse's thoughts. Might not this woman have been Rose Pierret, as Clémidot had originally been told? Notwithstanding her disarming appearance and ready blushes, this young person distributed her favours rather lavishly and had confided to Clarisse some rather compromising details. Besides, had not Clémidot shown rather too much interest in her? One never knows. So Mme. Manzon began to write again and went on writing, and this is the new story which she invented:—

"On the Sunday after M. Fualdès' death, as I was coming away from Mass at the cathedral, a man handed me a letter enclosed in a ball of thread, and hurried away. He spoke a kind of patois and looked quite young. On reaching home, I unwound the ball, not a very bulky one, and read the letter, which was very well written and contained these words: 'A woman who was at the Bancals' assumed your name. If by chance this is discovered, you need not deny it, for you run no risk, as you saw and heard nothing. You need only say that you went there to speak to some one, that you were locked in, and that, having fainted, you heard nothing and saw nothing. You are to say that you were taken by some one quite unknown to you to the City Square, that the night was too dark for you to be able to recognise him again, etc. . . .'"

Not a single statement in this letter gained credence. Even when Mme. Manzon added in confidence that it was Rose Pierret who had been to the Bancals', she was not believed. Moreover, for some reason which is unknown, the somewhat emancipated daughter of the police official played an insignificant part in this affair in comparison with her rival's dazzling rôle. The prefect, extremely disgruntled at this new aspect of the matter, merely sent this new paper to the prosecutor for the crown and left Rodez.

At length the trial, so eagerly awaited, was fixed for the 14th August, and on that day, amidst the intense excitement of the whole town, the judges of the Assize Court arrived in closed carriages. The first of them was M. Grenier, sergeant-at-law at the Court of Montpellier, who had served in turn as attorney at Béziers, sub-prefect of the same

place and vice-president of the legislature. The next was M. Sicard, a Greek scholar of great repute, "as remarkable, it is understood, for his profound knowledge as for his piety." Then there were M. de Lunaret de Plantade and M. Marcel de Serres, who were the puisne judges. Besides these came also the chief public prosecutor, M. Jun de Siran, and M. Castan, the attorney-general. The inhabitants of Rodez repeated these names to one another with great pride, since it was their unflagging persistence which had brought justice within their own walls, and in anticipation they already enjoyed their triumph.

The day before she had to appear in court, Mme. Manzon became alarmed at the prefect's silence. It was evident that he was very angry and was considering what steps to take. So the undaunted letter-writer seized a sheet of paper and began a fresh screed to him.

"How could I have been so culpably imprudent as to allow myself to become involved in a labyrinth from which I cannot possibly escape except by the direct intervention of Providence? And the greatest of my misfortunes has certainly been that I have risked your displeasure and, what is worse, your scorn. Why was I guilty of deviating from the truth? What could have induced me to step aside even for a moment from the path marked out for me, and that for the sake of judges who are incapable of believing that I am sacrificing myself for them and overwhelm me with their insulting suspicions! My heart is broken, and I am become a prey to the gloomiest despair. I am quite beside myself.

"Forgive me, sir, if I venture to ask of you one small favour which I hope to obtain. I do not ask for

my life or for my freedom, but to know whether I am to be condemned to be separated from my son Edward.

"I throw myself at your feet and implore your aid. Surely you will have compassion on me, and not allow my child to be taken away from me. . . . !"

The letter continued for some time in the same strain, but the Comte d'Estourmel treated it with indifference, and did not even send her an acknowledgment.

We come now to the 15th August when, after Vespers, the procession of the Vow of Louis XIII. moved slowly through the gloomy streets to the accompaniment of the impressive tolling of the bells. From her window on the second floor Mme. Manzoni looked down, as before the throng of silent and wondering spectators it filed across the stage to which the quaint old houses of the town formed the setting. All the authorities were present, both the officers of the royalist army with which she had been so unfortunately entangled, and the officials of justice, clad in purple and ermine, coming out of the red stone cathedral with the prefect of the Aveyron walking at their head. He caught sight of that tiresome witness, who never said what he wanted, and cast a look of anger at her.

The procession went on its way, and as the judges, calm and dignified, and surrounded by all the representatives of power and justice, filed past, the people believed that they had already obtained their revenge. They gazed with respect at the scarlet robes, which reminded them of the scaffold for which they had clamoured so long; and began to feel confident that their cruel hopes would not be frustrated.

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The next day, M. Juin de Siran asked M. Enjalran to send his daughter for an interview at eight o'clock in the evening. She agreed to go there and, as the prefect had also decided to summon her at the same hour, she wrote to him:—

"Sir,—I am extremely sorry to be unable to comply with your request. I was very anxious to see you, and several times to-day I was on the point of writing to ask you for a five minutes' interview, but you seemed so angry yesterday that I refrained. At my father's command, I am obliged to go at eight o'clock this evening to see a gentleman, whose name I forget, but I believe that he is lodging at M. Maynier's.

To-morrow at one o'clock, if that time suits you, I shall have the honour of seeing you, M. le Préfet, and doubtless for the last time, as the following day is the fateful one.

"You say that my letter touched you. Heaven be thanked that there are still some people in the world who can be moved to compassion . . . !"

While the prefect was reading these sentences, followed by many others, Mme. Manzon hastened to M. Juin de Siran. This gentleman, a knight of Saint Louis, and a very shrewd and distinguished personage, did not have recourse to threats. He received her with old-world politeness, declared that he had often heard of her and her beautiful voice, and eventually touched on the tragedy, on which, however, he had no desire to dwell. Skilfully as his questions were framed, he could get no satisfactory replies, as was indeed only to be expected.

On the following day, the prefect met with no better success, and, as he retired discomfited before

the flood of her reproaches, he declared to her, "I am not telling you, and I never have told you, to swear to your first statement, if it does not represent all the facts. I am only asking you to explain what induced you to make it. You are only concerned with one thing, your duty; and you have to say but one thing, the truth."

Reasonable as his words were, they did not serve to calm Clarisse's violent emotions. That very same evening she broke into the presence of M. Grenier, the president of the Assize Court, in fresh trouble, resulting from a violent scene between herself, her father, and her nurse, Victoire. The last named had created more confusion by saying that Mme. Manzon had confessed to having been to the Bancals' house, whereas Clarisse maintained that all she had related to Victoire were Clémendot's infamous assertions about that visit. The scene had been a tragic one. The president of the military court had worked himself into an extraordinary temper and attempted to strike his daughter, whilst Victoire fainted, and little Edward, uttering shrill cries, tried to defend his mother.

Escaping with difficulty from the hubbub, she had gained access to M. Grenier, and was surprised to meet the prefect and also de Plantade and de Lunaret there. With flashing eyes, dilated nostrils, and breast heaving with emotion, she was almost beautiful, and she astonished and intimidated her new audience. She declared afresh that she had never been inside the Bancals' house, that she must have been mad to allow any one to believe it, and that she would hold a pistol to Clémendot's head and force him to tell the truth, and, if he refused, she would blow out his brains!

The men of law looked at her anxiously, and

wondered what would happen if she behaved in that manner before the court. She was quite capable of upsetting the jury, who had been selected with the most scrupulous care. They wondered whether it would not be better to do without her statement, but would not that arouse the fury of the people, who were blindly confident, and expected from her the most startling revelations? Till a late hour that night, the prefect and the judges used every means in their power to soothe and reassure her; and they must certainly have been successful, for the next morning, before the trial had commenced, the Comte d'Estourmel received another letter from her:—

“ Even if for one moment I had entertained any doubts as to your goodness to me, yesterday evening, at the Chief President’s, you gave me proofs of it which I shall never forget, as long as I live. I read in your gaze the depths of your compassion for me and for my father, and possibly you may have believed that I had some confession to make. Who has a better right to my confidence than M. d’Estourmel? You wish to know my secret and I consent; soon it shall be known to all the world. . . . ”

The prefect did not trouble to read any further than this. She had written, “ You wish to know my secret and I consent; ” and that was enough for him. She *had* a secret, and confessed that she had, and that she would reveal it. Thanks to his tactful questioning, the Court of Assizes would soon know the whole truth.

As a matter of fact this secret might be one of many kinds, but M. d’Estourmel was convinced that it was to be a full and detailed account of the

crime in the Bancals' house. And if fresh proof of this were needed, it was furnished by the appearance of Clarisse at the door of his house, begging for the return of that compromising letter, threatening to tear from him with her nails that scrap of paper on which her disordered imagination had urged her to scribble during the night.

"No, madam," he replied, "it is too late, and the time is come for us to go to the tribunal. I hold in my hand your written promise, and you must remember that you have to keep it. You have said in the presence of the law that you have a secret, and it will have the power to force you to reveal it!"

Thereupon the prefect set out for the Assize Court, filled with hope that, in spite of everything, the success of his diplomacy and the willingness of Clarisse were assured. He gave her credit for common sense, which showed how little he knew of women. It was certain beforehand that he would be undeceived.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRAGEDY OF RODEZ

THE scene of the trial was a vast and lofty hall, which had been restored and enlarged, and was reserved for special occasions. It was divided into three parts: at the far end was a raised platform, in the centre of which were the seats for the judges and the members of the bar, and behind these on the wall hung a large crucifix. To the right were the places reserved for the jury, and on the left behind the bar of the defending counsel were the benches for the prisoners, arranged in two tiers.

All this reserved part of the hall was still empty, but the middle of the horse-shoe enclosure and the rest of the space were filled by a throng of civil and military officials mingled with priests, knights of Saint Louis and St. John of Jerusalem, and other distinguished people. General de Vautré had left Rodez, but the Comte d'Estournel and his official secretary, M. de Cabrières, were present. These represented the forces which had hitherto governed the country, but a new force now unobtrusively made its appearance for the first time—the Press came to take a hand in the Fualdès case, and it could not have chosen a better moment to assert itself. It was to give widespread notoriety to this terrible melodrama. The *Journal de Paris*, the *Quotidienne*, and even the *Moniteur* had sent representatives to Rodez, and, before the term was coined, were to inaugurate the art of law-reporting.

All the important editors and publishers in the country were prepared to issue full accounts of the trial systematically edited by an officer appointed by the Court, so that there might be an exact record and the report might be confined as closely as possible to the real issue. And consequently, with these records, future generations would be able to form an independent judgment.

Outside was a swaying surging mob, kept in order by several squadrons of police, and shepherded into the presence chamber by the National Guard and a detachment of territorial infantry under the command of the Marquis de Suffren. And this crowd, as quick to anger as to pity, were in reality the judges whose decision had already been made, and who were now only concerned with the way in which it should be carried out.

Last of all, at the extreme end of the hall, a large gallery had been specially constructed for ladies at the suggestion of the prefect, and there they were to throng during each day of the trial, in toilets which were somewhat provincial in appearance but nevertheless very charming. The expense did not trouble them, although every seat cost ten francs which were to be applied for the benefit of the poor. They considered ten francs quite a low price for the tragedy which was about to be played before them, and whose beginning they awaited so impatiently.

But the curtain had not yet risen. The members of the Court and the jury, escorted by the National Guard, had gone to the cathedral at eleven o'clock to hear the Mass of the Holy Ghost, whose inspiration had indeed been rarely more needed. An enormous congregation had knelt round them in the church, consisting of those people who had not been

fortunate enough to obtain a place in the Court. Peasants had flocked into the town from all the neighbouring villages, and all around the immense mass of the red cathedral, in the Square of the Bishopric, from the Rue du Terral as far as the entrance to the fatal lane off the Rue des Hebdomadiers, stretched a vast sea of people on whose ears fell at regular intervals the sound of the bell. And the only desire, almost a prayer, which ascended from every heart was to avenge M. Fualdès, and to cleanse the honour of the Rouergue from the stain.

The bell was no longer to be heard, so the Mass must be ended. Within the confines of the court a rumour spread that the judges had reached the Council Chamber, and the moment so eagerly awaited had at length arrived.

Suddenly there was a sensation as a young man, pale and of striking appearance, came in with his counsel, Maître Merlin. It was Didier Fualdès. People crowded round him and he shook their outstretched hands. He gazed at the tumultuous throng and felt that it was in sympathy with his wrongs, and then his face became strangely set in hard lines, for a door opened opposite to him and the prisoners entered between two lines of police.

Bastide and Jausion walked in first, and were followed closely by Bach, Colard, and the woman Bancal. These were all given seats on the highest tier of benches, and it seemed as if, even before the trial began, they were specially marked out as having incurred the severest penalties of the law. All the prisoners looked gloomy and dejected, with the exception of Bastide, who cast a steady glance and a challenging smile at the crowd in the hall.

Maître Arsaud next led in two ladies quietly

dressed, with their eyes worn by weeping and their faces blanched by five months of suffering and imprisonment. They walked to their places on the lower bench next to the other prisoners, Bousquier, Missonnier, Anne Benoît, and Marianne Bancal, and, before seating themselves, Mme. Jausion threw her arms round her husband's neck and Mme. Galtier held her brother in a close embrace. These poor women had not been allowed to communicate with any one outside the prison since the beginning of April, and had been living in complete ignorance of all the plots woven around them ; and they were dragged before the tribunal despite the absence of any reliable evidence against their entire innocence. And now they were made a spectacle before the eyes of their former friends, who sat fanning themselves in their seats in the gallery. Overcome with emotion they wept anew, Bastide ceased to smile, and every one was affected, for so closely are terror and pity intermingled.

Meanwhile the defending counsel, most of whom were local lawyers, took their places. But it was Bastide's advocate who attracted all the attention : he was a man who always occupied the centre of the stage, though people hardly knew why.

Maître Jean Dominique Joseph Louis Romiguères, barrister at the Court of Appeal at Toulouse, was at that time forty-two years old and in the full tide of a successful career. The whole of the south of France was proud of his oratory, at once stronger and more restrained than that of his colleagues at the bar, the firmness and lucidity of his argument, and also his complete loyalty. He had devoted himself entirely to his legal work, and it was not until after 1830 that by way of recognition for his liberal politics he was to rise to

the dignity of procurator-general, then to membership of the Supreme Court, and finally to a seat in the House of Peers. It had been a wise move on the part of Bastide to entrust his case to a man whom no one could allege to be an *ultra*, and whose opinions were in no way distrusted either by the middle class or by the lower orders.

For his part Romiguières had only undertaken the defence in order that he might strive to find out the truth. He was not there merely to engage in an oratorical duel with the counsel for the crown, but, being firmly convinced of his client's innocence, and also that royalist policy was in no way involved in the matter, he was there to carry out his professional duty without being unduly disturbed by the difficulties of his task. Yet they were by no means small. In criminal cases the rights of the ^{bar} ~~bar and the public~~ were much more limited than they are to-day. Counsel did not take part in the preliminary investigation, and a strict supervision was exercised by the magistrates over his interviews with his clients, and so he was hampered at all times. But in this case the situation was still worse. Maître Romiguières, having undertaken the defence of Bastide, was looked on almost as an enemy of the state, as a dangerous accomplice of injustice and crime. It was even hinted to him that the public anger would be so great as to prevent him from speaking for the defence. And before this long and painful story draws to a close, he will be seen to give up the case of his own accord and, admitting his defeat, take upon himself, as it were, a vow of silence in regard to it.

"The Court. Hats off!"

This was the signal for the appearance of the judges in their scarlet robes, and immediately the

attention of the whole assembly was focused upon them. In view of the complexity and importance of the case, the court was composed of M. Grenier, knight of the Legion of Honour, as president, and our other judges, with two deputies. The public prosecutor, the attorney general, and another crown lawyer also were in their places.

It had been a lengthy business to constitute the court, and the empanelling of the jury was an equally lengthy and delicate process. The list of jurors had been very carefully drawn up, and the names had been selected from a longer list prepared with great discrimination by the prefect. This arbitrary procedure had not aimed at filling the jury-box with men who were stupid or ignorant, for their cowardice or well-meaning obstinacy might have had untoward results; on the contrary, the fate of the eleven prisoners was to depend on persons who belonged mainly to the aristocratic or upper middle classes, who were intelligent and would discharge faithfully the duty which the community laid on them.

There were further formalities with regard to the roll call of the witnesses, who numbered three hundred and twenty, two hundred and forty-three for the prosecution, and seventy-seven for the defence. Finally, Maître Merlin rose to his feet to read the declaration of Didier Fualdès, who had made use of his right to intervene.

This turned out to be a very poor piece of provincial eloquence. Side by side with the grim drama of which even the most improbable details made the audience shudder with excitement, the local lawyer held forth on his clients' business affairs. He said that the fortune which they had counted on as their own had vanished; even the

books which might have cast some light on their true position 'had been destroyed. . . . Nevertheless no one should cast any doubt on the honourable intentions of the widow and orphan, for they claimed no personal compensation and were acting only on behalf of the creditors whose security had disappeared ; and Didier seconded these generous statements in a few high-flown sentences which drew tears from many of his hearers.

After another speech by the president, the most weighty and important part of the day's proceedings was reached, namely the reading of the indictment.

Maître Romiguières was probably the only person in the hall who was at all sceptical of its veracity, though as a matter of fact the document which was to form the basis of the proceedings was extraordinarily weak. M. Maynier, whose vacillations of mind we have followed, had had a heavy task in framing it ; it bore traces of other hands besides his own, and consisted of a somewhat forced combination of the evidence of Rousquier, little Magdelaine's stories, and even Bancal's improbable death-bed confession, to which, however, it did not specifically refer. To this main theme were added a number of current rumours, in order to conceal the vagueness and improbability of the story by the addition of a mass of detail. For instance, the way in which the victim's blood had been disposed of ; a description of the portfolio which had been stolen from M. Fualdès ; a quite unproved statement of a debt of ten thousand francs owed by Bastide to his godfather ; and the repetition of all the tittle-tattle which could prejudice the accused. The only statement lacking was Mme. Manzoni's, since that had been made after the indictment was prepared.

For the dastardly crime, carefully planned and carried out with so much daring and recklessness the indictment, being a reflection of public opinion, could point to no other motive than robbery—a motive suggested by the search for papers and the possible removal of some of them, which was alleged to have taken place at M. Fualdès' house on the day after the murder. . . .

"And that applies only to Jausion," ran Romi-guières' thoughts. "It is quite out of the question as regards my client. Why on earth, then, do they maintain that it was he who organised and carried out the whole affair?"

His sturdy common sense reassured him, but he became less confident when he looked round the hall. There was not one of the spectators who shared his opinions, and their horrified murmurs formed a chorus of approval to the chief passages in the indictment. So strong was the feeling against the prisoners that had they been released on the spot, they would not have been allowed to leave the court alive.

"Nothing can be more just than to punish murderers," reflected the great lawyer, "but stronger evidence than mere supposition must be brought against them. All I can see in this accusation is a number of hypotheses more or less skilfully combined."

M. Juin de Siran must have been of the same opinion, because he endeavoured to prove to the jury that they could come to a decision even if absolutely conclusive proof were lacking.

"The jury," he said, "must take into account the impression made on them and even of their own feelings in the course of the trial. The legality of proof consists in the sincerity and scrupulous

impartiality of its investigation. Let us put away from us all foregone conclusions, let us seek out the truth with the sincerity inspired by love of virtue, and the truth will then reveal itself spontaneously."

By this he implied that the jury were to form their opinion on the evidence as it developed and not on the case as formulated in his opening statement, and this was of course quite reasonable. The court then adjourned, but it was to have twenty-four more sittings.

That same evening the Comte d'Estourmel gave a reception to the judges, jurors, the civil authorities, and his friends, Didier and honest Sasmayous, in the great saloons of the prefecture, which was brilliantly illuminated. And here was revealed another aspect of this fierce struggle at Rodez in which so many different interests were involved. The impressions gathered from the opening of the case were brought here to be revised and moulded to the desired form. Here too were carried the rumours current in the excited town, phrases whose meaning became altered as they passed from mouth to mouth, and fictions which were readily accepted as well-founded statements. And what increased the uneasiness of this court of justice engaged in waging a kind of battle was the thought that a thousand secret plots were being woven around the Fualdès case. Whilst judge and jurors exchanged their views in the prefect's drawing-rooms, the prisoners were kept in close confinement and reduced to complete helplessness; but their friends held secret meetings, intimidated some witnesses and bribed others, and purchased Mme. Manzon's silence. Each one of these gatherings was like a council held on the eve of a battle.

So daily for nearly a whole month, judges and jury

gathered fresh strength to discharge the mighty task imposed on them. In this atmosphere of strained excitement every one sought for the most infallible means of sacrificing the prisoners to the shade of M. Fualdès. If the law could not accomplish this purpose so much the worse for the law, for it would be condemned mercilessly by public opinion; like the government of Louis XVIII., it would be deemed to be the accomplice of "brigands" who sought to continue in the district of Aveyron the crimes of the White Terror. The citizens would no longer enjoy any security whatever.

On the 19th, 20th, and 21st August no fresh evidence was produced, but numerous witnesses testified to trivial details, and all the prisoners persistently denied the truth of Bousquier's statements, so that no progress was made. Mme. Manzon's appearance was awaited with the keenest curiosity, and despite her vacillation and obstinate silence every one was certain that this woman was going to solve the mystery by a single word.

She was called on the 22nd August, and on that day large receipts were taken at the doors. Every one hoped that at last they had finished with the dry legal proceedings, and an audience, especially of women, loves a melodrama. The fine hall was crowded to suffocation, and when M. Juin de Siran said to the usher, "Call the witness Mme. Manzon," a thrill went through the assembly.

There was a dead silence, and even the judges held their breath as the witness appeared, dressed in black with a large black ruffle round her neck; she wore a straw hat gracefully turned up on one side and draped with a wide veil which almost entirely concealed her face. She walked slowly

to her place, feeling every eye fixed on her and every ear attentive to catch her slightest word. It is to be doubted whether she paid any attention to the president, who endeavoured in an opening speech to induce her to relate the story which was expected of her.

"Madame," said M. Grenier, "the public is convinced that you were brought into the Bancals' house by chance and against your will. You are looked on as an angelic visitant sent by Providence to throw light on this horrible mystery. . . ."

Mme. Manzoni had no desire to play the part of an angel, and did not say a word.

"I beg you to speak," continued the good-natured president. "Even if you have been guilty of some indiscretion, the declaration you are about to make and the great service you are going to perform will be sufficient to make every one forget it."

But all his encouragement was unavailing, and all she did was to complain bitterly that Jausion had bowed to her when she came into the hall, as if she had some connection with him. Then she fainted in the arms of Major-General Desperrières, who fortunately happened to be on the spot, and he carried her out on to the terrace. A large quantity of *Eau des Carmes* was administered, but when she revived all she could do was to shriek, "Take those murderers out of my sight!" and give way to various forms of hysteria.

"Come, Madame," said M. Grenier, mildly but firmly, "try to control your imagination and have no fear. You are in the sanctuary of justice and in the presence of judges who will protect you. Let us hear the truth, and speak out bravely. Were you not a witness of the murder of M. Fualdès?"

And Mme. Manzon replied, "I have never been inside the Bancal woman's house. I did not go there, and I will maintain the truth of my words at the foot of the scaffold."

She would not contradict these statements, but when she noticed how her denials told in favour of the prisoners, she tried to accuse them without implicating herself by saying that she believed in their guilt and that "a man like Jausion who could kill his own child was quite capable of killing his friend or anybody else." And when she had launched these accusations she clung tenaciously to her previous denials.

"I did make an imprudent confession, but it was false and I retracted it, and, as I told Mme. Pons, that confession was wrung from me through fear of my father. If you only knew how cruelly he threatened me. . . ."

At this point the president became quite lyrical and cried in moving accents, "For the sake of your unhappy father bowed down by sorrow, for the sake of justice and of humanity groaning beneath this awful tragedy, and whose unity has been rudely shattered by this crime which menaces the whole of civilised society, I entreat you to tell all you know. What is your object in concealing the truth? Even if you have been betrayed into some error with which your conscience reproaches you, now is the time to recover your good name in the public estimation. You see how eagerly every one is listening to you. Speak then, I implore you, and justify yourself in the presence of Him whose image you see before you. The public, horrified at a crime committed on the person of a man well-known to you, who was once a colleague of your father, desires nothing but that the truth shall

prevail ; and you will be loved and extolled to the skies if you will only reveal the names of the real culprits. Prove to us that you have been instructed in the love of justice, and that you yourself wish justice to be done. Remember that in your letters you have often spoken of the honour of your family ; that this honour must never be tainted by perjury ; and that any wounds that are inflicted on it can never be healed. You are the daughter of an Enjalran and of a judge, and you *must* speak. . . .”

The daughter of an Enjalran could not remain unmoved by such a flood of eloquence, so she fainted again for the second time into the arms of the Major-General ; and unfortunately, when she came to herself, her hand happened to touch the sword of that most useful officer and she shrieked out, “ Ah ! you have a knife ! ” And after uttering this melodramatic cry, she immediately went into a third fainting fit.

You may imagine the stir and sensation that was caused, and how much sympathy was aroused. The ladies in their reserved seats enjoyed the luxury of a good cry in return for their ten francs.

Still M. Grenier would not acknowledge himself defeated, and again urged her to confess.

“ Try to overcome your fears,” he said. “ You are the daughter of a judge and must have often seen the machinery of the law at work and followed other trials besides this one, so there can be nothing new or alarming in it for you. Be brave and do not let your imagination get the better of you.” And then he added encouragingly, “ Tell us something at any rate ! ”

Unable to hold out any longer against his persistence, Mme. Manzoni had recourse to the same

evasion she had tried previously, and began to speak of what must have happened at the Bancals—how some woman did chance to be there, how Bastide wanted to kill her, and Jausion had saved her and had made her swear a solemn oath over the dead body. Would to Heaven she were only able to tell them who this woman was; it was possible that before very long she would reveal her identity. These various explanations were punctuated by a fourth attack of hysteria.

With bated breath the judges, jury, audience, and accused followed this theatrical outburst, and every one put his or her own interpretation on her sentences. "Save me from the murderers," Clarisse was supposed to have murmured in the arms of the Major-General . . . "You will not always be near me, General, and if they were to escape they would slay in cold blood all the law-abiding people in the district."

It was at this point that Didier Fualdès was seized with an ingenuous and theatrical idea: "It is clear that Mme. Manzon dares not speak because she is terrified at the presence of my father's murderers, so I venture to request the president to have a body of eight armed men placed between her and the accused; that will prevent her from seeing them and serve also to calm her fears."

This request was granted and eight gendarmes formed a barrier between Clarisse and the prisoners, but it may be readily imagined that this produced no more tangible result than if it had been a scene from a play by the latest popular dramatist.

"I entreat you, madame," cried Didier, "in the name of those you hold most dear, your father and your son, to tell the truth. I ask you even on

behalf of the accused. If they are innocent it is in your power to save them by a single word. Speak then, madame—a son begs you to avenge his father's death."

And from his seat on the bench M. Juin de Siran added, "Madame, you have nothing to fear; I myself will stand surety for you and make use of all the power conferred on me by law. I demand that Mme. Manzoni be given forthwith a guard of armed men, who will be able to protect her against any possible danger."

Although Mme. Manzoni could not fail to be flattered at her escort of soldiers, these operative precautions did not avail to loosen her tongue, so the president adopted other means. Making use of the story invented by her that it was another woman who was hidden in the ante-room, he turned to Bastide and said, "You were in the Bancals' house at the time of the murder. Was it you who suggested . . ."

"I have already had the honour of assuring you, M. le Président," broke in Grammont eagerly, "that whatever Mme. Manzoni may say, I have never had any connection with the Bancal household."

"Confess, you wretch," she exclaimed, stamping her foot.

A shudder ran through the court at her words. Surely she was on the point of pronouncing others of a similar kind, but of more significant portent. An exclamation is no proof, and all that this one would seem to imply was that if Bastide would only confess, he could free Mme. Manzoni from a most perplexing dilemma. But the president pretended to find quite a different meaning in it, and after allowing sufficient time for Clarisse's

exclamation to produce its fullest effect, he said to her, "How can you accuse the prisoners with such assurance unless you admit that you yourself were in the Bancals' house?"

"How can they deny it, when so many witnesses have given evidence against them?"

That was all she would say, and she retired from the witness-box in favour of the two people, her cousin Rodat and her maid Victoire, to whom she had gossiped so much already. She listened to them without uttering a word, and allowed them to implant the firm conviction in every one's mind that she herself knew everything but could say nothing. And then the romantic but enigmatic heroine left the court surrounded by her armed escort.

In spite of the somewhat unsatisfactory nature of the proceedings the public was content and looked forward to hearing Clémandot's evidence on the next day. However, they were greatly disappointed in him—he was no romantic lover and created a very poor impression on the court. People yawned audibly at his statements, which were a mere repetition of what they had already heard. It was only towards the end of his evidence that his nasal voice was heard to make some observation which revived public interest in him.

"Reports unfavourable to Mme. Manzon's reputation," he said, "have been circulated in regard to some of her communications. It therefore seems necessary that I should explain the relations which existed. . . ."

"Continue, M. Clémandot," exclaimed the lady immediately. "I shall not trouble to contradict you."

This was becoming quite interesting and the fans

in the galleries ceased fluttering, but President Grenier, who, was more bent on avenging Fualdès than vindicating Mme. Manzoni's reputation, silenced the witness remorselessly, thereby effectually quenching the sensation he had wished to produce.

On that day the case did not make the slightest progress. It was all to no purpose that the prefect's long report was read, which related in great detail his fruitless efforts to extract anything from the elusive Clarisse. It was of no avail that from the lobbies of the court witnesses were produced who reported stray sentences they had heard her utter on the previous day, during the intervals between her fainting fits. It was all in vain that the president, Didier, and even the prisoners themselves begged her to give a lucid explanation. All that they could extract from her were these phrases repeated over and over again: "I never went to the Bancals . . . I will never say that I did, I would rather die on the scaffold. It is outrageous for every one to insist that I was a witness of the affair. It is inconceivable. Anything that I have ever said previously is false. I am telling the truth before the court. You are trying to force me into a horrible confession . . . I did not see the crime committed. I will never say that I did."

She continued in this strain for a long time, and it was in vain that Major-General Desperrières, M. France de Lorne, and sundry other people who had been near her, or had come with her, tried all sorts of ways and means to extort a confession. They had to fall back on other witnesses, but every one's attention was concentrated on her. Her very attitude, her looks, her obstinate silence and her attacks of nerves, all led people to believe in dark conspiracies. Everybody in France knew

all about her. M. Decazes, the Prime Minister, ably seconded by M. Bertin de Vaux and M. Villemain, turned the mystery to good account in that portentous year 1817. The elections were close at hand, and the Bonapartists were stirring up secret strife; the evils of war and invasion were still far from being ended . . . So that the Fualdès case might prove a splendid diversion for every one's mind, especially now that the opportune appearance of Clarisse Enjalran would remove it from the region of politics and transform it into an exciting, moving, and complicated drama. The newspapers, even those with the most rigid and unchanging policy, increased the length of their reports of the case, and in the remotest parts of France every one was bent on solving the problem which had distracted Aveyron for the last six months.

Meanwhile, at Rodez, the prosecution was making use of the earliest depositions, first Bousquier's tale and then the stories related by Bancals' children. The children themselves were not produced. After all their childish babble had been extracted from them, they were allowed to sink back into the squalid obscurity from which they never again emerged. But some other children to whom they had spoken were brought as witnesses, particularly two little girls of ten or eleven years old, who came into the tribunal as if it were a church, called M. Grenier "*mon père*," and related very prettily all the horrors with which we are already acquainted.

Evidence continued to be taken right up till the 3rd September. Most of it aimed at breaking down the important alibi produced by Bastide. The prisoner countered by one reply, namely that

the witnesses had made false statements about the days and the times, and he in his turn was able to substantiate the truth of his earlier statements, thanks to a whole series of proofs. There was a farrier who had seen him mount his horse late in the afternoon and ride back to Gros, and the evidence of people who had met him on the way, servants who had been with him, and others on his estate. Several priests gave evidence as to his moral character, and tried their best to remove the terrible suspicions that had been formed against him. Undoubtedly the most moving evidence in his favour was that of Mme. Vernhes, whose eyes were dimmed with weeping as she saw her brother, brother-in-law, and two of her sisters all in the dock. In spite of all the attempts which were made to weaken her evidence, every one in court was deeply affected by her appearance.

In order to turn the tide of public opinion, President Grenier made use of his discretionary power by calling a number of additional and unexpected witnesses. As the case proceeded and it became clear that the judges were bent on punishing the perpetrators of the crime, traces of it were discovered everywhere, and people vied with one another in coming forward with proofs against the murderers.

And yet some of the available witnesses were not called. For instance, on the floor above the Bancals there lived a family of Spanish refugees named Saavedra. It seemed difficult to believe that these people neither heard nor saw anything that was happening just below them, since the floor boards were worm-eaten and split in several places. Here was certainly one means of verifying either the planning or the actual perpetration of the crime in

the Bancals' house ; but no use was made of it. The Spaniards said that they had noticed nothing unusual, so what need was there to question them further ? No one troubled about these details.

In spite of everything the jury remained impartial and waited for further developments. But they could scarcely fail to notice the discrepancies in the case for the prosecution, and particularly the absence of any cause commensurate with the dastardly nature of the crime. Something was lacking to strengthen their belief, and they were convinced that Mme. Manzoni was the only person who could produce it.

As the case went on, fresh efforts were made, but without success, to obtain her evidence. On the 1st September, that absurd person Clémendot made an effort to rouse her by trying to regale the public anew with the details of his commonplace love affair.

" M. le Président," he said, " I claim the right to speak. Until to-day I have observed the utmost reticence. I have shown the greatest possible consideration and tact towards Mme. Manzoni, as I hoped by this means to induce her to speak the entire truth frankly in the presence of the court. But since my hopes have not been fulfilled, I must reveal on what terms I stood with that lady, in order to show how I obtained her confidence and prove, if necessary, that in the report I made I was actuated solely by my desire for truth and justice."

Mme. Manzoni had seemed perfectly willing beforehand to allow their intimacy to be made public, and you could have heard a pin drop. But to everybody's great disappointment the president again refused to listen to the indiscreet officer.

"The setting out of your private relations with Mme. Manzon," he said, "will not affect in the slightest degree the belief that we have in the truth of your statement. Kindly sit down."

So as there was no longer any hope of hearing any racy details from this witness, no further interest was taken in him. On the 3rd September the closing speeches began.

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Most people are acquainted with the kind of language used at that period by judges and lawyers. For a very long while both judicial eloquence and pulpit oratory have been at least fifty years behind the development of real literary language—any one can easily verify the fact for himself. When any particular school of thought has definitely decided that its stock phrases are worn out, when its imagery, periphrases, and metaphors have been dropped even by the common people, and the very penny-a-liners hesitate to offer them to their readers—these ancient relics of a worn-out method of expression find sanctuary in the temple of the goddess of justice. It will therefore not be considered remarkable that the lawyers of Rodez mouthed with emphasis phrases as florid as those with which third rate imitators of Marmontel's plays have provided their characters, and rendered them more piquant by the addition of choice provincialisms and an accent which by itself was worthy of a pension.

The palm for oratory would probably have been carried off by Maître Merlin, who appeared for the Fualdès family. His long speech, quite worthless as an argument, was, to make up for it, loaded with exclamations, questions, and sundry other

figures of rhetoric, which in those days were often mistaken for logic.

"In this very place which recalls and ever will recall the integrity and devotion to the public good of this ill-fated judge, I seem to hear his voice from the depths of the tomb addressing you in these sad words, 'What have I done to deserve this fate? I was a good friend, a good kinsman, and a good father. . . .'"

And after using his utmost endeavours to prove that Mme. Manzoni's wild statements were tantamount to an explicit proof of the prisoners' guilt, he made way for the public prosecutor.

This official had undertaken to address the court in the place of M. Maynier, who had shown himself rather too sceptical about the prisoners' guilt, and his speech was much more restrained than M. Merlin's. He was particularly anxious to prove that the case had no political significance whatever.

"The very day after the murder of M. Fualdès," he said, "the criminals, feeling certain that the eyes of the public were already riveted upon them, did their utmost to divert suspicion into a quarter likely to cause a miscarriage of justice. We have seen in the course of the proceedings what they said and did to further this object. They, as well as their friends, set about disseminating reports calculated to make every one believe that the supporters of the king were the perpetrators of this awful crime . . . Men who did not hesitate to sacrifice their fortunes and to shed their blood for their king, and to uphold the rights of the crown were ready to die beneath the axe of the Revolution, but never sullied their hands with the dagger of an assassin. But the secret intrigues of the criminals were soon unravelled, and we are no longer ignorant

of the identity of those who planned this most revolting crime, prompted by the most sordid motives and carried out with the most barbarous cruelty."

He next expounded in careful detail all the evidence that could possibly be brought against the prisoners, and appealed to the jury to recognise their guilt and show clearly the motive for their crime.

On the 4th September, Maître Combarel spoke in defence of the woman Bancal, and pleaded very convincingly that she had been accused on the flimsiest grounds:

"The invaluable Mme. Manzoni," he remarked, "has told us nothing definite either in her written statements or during her attacks of hysteria. She is the angel of darkness, who promised us light and then left us in still deeper gloom."

Finally, on the 5th September, after the hearing of a witness in Bastide's defence, Romiguières stood up to speak.

His task was a particularly difficult one, since the lawyer from Toulouse had an audience opposed almost to a man to his views and his client, and with whom he had already come into conflict in the course of the trial. It had amazed him on several occasions to hear some of the witnesses improve on their first statements and, after six months had gone by, solemnly repeat categorically and with elaborate detail, statements which they had hesitated to make on the day after the murder. When he had ventured to protest against public prejudice he was accused of insulting the citizens and he had been the recipient of threatening letters. So the opening of his long address was full of skilfully worded insinuations.

"Suppose Bastide were innocent," he began, "and you must at any rate allow him this supposition, could any worse calamity have befallen him? Fualdès' sufferings were short and then he entered into eternal rest, but for five months Bastide has been the victim to the most cruel pangs of grief, humiliation, and despair."

"The law deems him innocent and yet he has been treated throughout as the worst of criminals; the law deems him innocent and yet his hands are shackled with irons and his limbs have been lacerated by chains; the law deems him innocent and yet for five months, in defiance of every decree of justice and humanity, he has been condemned to the most rigorous solitude, deprived of any consolation, even of the presence of any members of his family. . . . No, gentlemen, in this I am mistaken, he has been allowed to find some of them on yonder bench, the two sisters whom he loves so dearly and who are so deserving of his affection, and has been permitted to mingle his tears with theirs."

At this point he was clever enough to flatter his audience.

"And now Bastide is standing in the presence of his judges, and indeed of most notable judges. The judges in this court have been chosen with the utmost discrimination by the chief justice, and are worthy of our most respectful homage. The jury has been selected from among the citizens of the highest repute, and is composed of men remarkable for their honesty and disinterestedness. They will show themselves to be beyond the reach of prejudice and deaf to the voice of calumny.

"And is there any one who has not suffered from calumny in the course of these unhappy proceedings?

It has even been said about you, citizens of Rodez, that, confusing your horror of the crime with your thirst for vengeance, you failed to differentiate between accusation and condemnation. I have even been told that I incurred danger to myself by appearing in defence of the accused, but the fact of my presence here, is a proof to you of my contempt for such suggestions!

"Far from feeling the slightest objection to coming here, I am delighted to visit a country which holds the humble birthplace of my family; a country to which my own native land is in some degree subject, since Toulouse owed to it and still owes its best lawyers.

"Yours is a country justly renowned, for it can point with pride to Bonald, one of our most learned political writers, to Flaugergues, one of our most eloquent and courageous speakers, and to Monseignat, one of the most widely esteemed contributors to the codes of law which govern us to-day. There are many others whom I could name, but praise of this kind does not beseem lips whose only task to-day is to deliver a speech for the defence."

After this opening passage, to which the public listened in subdued silence, the lawyer proceeded with his cautious speech for the defence, which lasted seven hours.

The outline of his speech, which was admirably developed, was briefly this: with regard to Bastide, the accusation is improbable and untrue, and in order to prove this he must consider in turn who the accused was, who the victim was, the nature of the crime, and what were the circumstances which led people to deduce his client's guilt.

With regard to the first point, Romigières

sketched a vivid picture of his client, and then by a bold stroke of imagination he too invoked the shade of Fualdès. Had he not done Bastide the honour of being his most devoted friend, and how could a man who had studied so deeply and who knew human nature so well make such an egregious mistake as to love a scoundrel as tenderly as if he were his own son?

As regards the second point, which he most ingeniously connected with the first one, the lawyer retraced the long intimacy between Fualdès and Bastide, and showed that no ill-feeling of any kind could possibly have existed between them. Even according to the prosecution itself the only possible motive for Grammont's attack on his godfather was self-interest.

Now, how could that have been? The prisoner's own fortune, the simplicity of his life, his untiring activity, and his high financial standing in the business circles of Rodez, were quite incompatible with the idea of this greed for gold which tempts people to undertake anything regardless of consequences.

"Besides," added the lawyer, "Fualdès was himself in difficulties. The securities in his possession were not sufficient to cover his debts, and the prisoner Jausion can furnish a most satisfactory account of such of the securities as are not to be found in his desk, so what could Bastide have stolen? Some one may say, 'The ten thousand francs which Fualdès owed him,' but this story is disproved by the very simple explanation given by the accused. He had only to mention the bonds for ten thousand francs with which Fualdès entrusted him on the 19th March, and which were found among his papers. Moreover, is it even likely

that Bastide would commit such a ghastly crime for the sake of a mere ten thousand francs?

"We come now to the third point—the murder itself. The atrocity of the crime at once excludes the supposition that Bastide could have been its author. Apart from the fact that nothing in his record suggests in any way that he was of so savage a nature, the prisoner could easily have taken his godfather's life in hundreds of different ways, without having recourse to such imprudent and expensive measures as the hiring of a number of assassins, who declare that they had no previous acquaintance with him.

"I shall be asked 'Who *did* commit the crime, and why did public opinion fasten at once upon Bastide?' The answer is that it did not—my client was not suspected on the first day; it was originally thought that Fualdès' death was due to suicide or to some personal grudge, or possibly that his death was prompted by party feeling, which saw in Fualdès a victim to be sacrificed to the rage of factions . . . Heaven forbid, gentlemen, that either my imagination or yours should accept such ideas for a moment. I am sure that they have not misled, and cannot mislead, anybody. But Fualdès went out at eight o'clock without saying where he was going, with no companion, no lantern, and carrying a bag of gold. He had nothing with him connected with the settlement of accounts or the carrying out of a business transaction. Perhaps he was going out to perform one of those acts of charity which were second nature to him; perhaps. . . ."

There was a threatening silence. Romiguières dared not venture to formulate his cherished theory, which had been confirmed in his own mind by some

whispered insinuations among Fualdès' colleagues. The bloodstained hand of death had spread a merciful veil of oblivion over the weaknesses of the dead man, and now that he lay wrapped in his purple shroud Fualdès' reputation must be held sacred. The lawyer observed that Didier was trembling with rage, that the judges looked gloomy, and the whole audience was showing signs of rising anger. Fearing to incur open hostility he worded his next sentence with great circumspection.

"We cannot raise the veil," he said, "but we must realise that this unfortunate man was the victim of some obscure crime, and that Bastide was incapable of being a party to a deed which had for its object nothing further than the theft of a bag of money."

As Romiguières was unable to dwell any longer on this part of his speech, he went back to a minute analysis of the evidence that had already been given. There had been a great deal of it, and he went on to expose its inconsistencies and absurdities. He derided the detailed evidence which had been produced so tardily, held Bousquier's tale up to eloquent and crushing scorn, and proved conclusively that not the slightest dependence could be placed on Mme. Manzoni's enigmatic utterances.

"Who is this Mme. Manzoni, who will not speak and whom every one is urging to speak, who will confess nothing and yet is believed to have made most remarkable confessions, who vows she has no secret and yet is pressed continually to reveal her secret?"

What could he possibly say in conclusion to people who wanted nothing but revenge, and were determined that this terrible murder should be most drastically punished? Romiguières' handling

of this point was a model of skilled dexterity. It is true that he quoted one of the legislative decrees of Charlemagne to the effect that "leaving a great crime unpunished is better than the sacrifice of an innocent life," but he added immediately, "We must not fail to believe that the death of this virtuous man will surely be avenged."

"It is this very certainty that I feel which makes me appeal confidently to you, gentlemen of the jury. My only concern is what may befall you in days to come. Those hurdy-gurdy players who disappeared on the day after the murder will assuredly return, and with them the truth will be made manifest. . . ."

At this reference the counsel for the Crown made a slight movement. Truth to tell he *had* traced the hurdy-gurdy men, who had returned to the Provençal Alps, but as they had sworn that no one had paid them to play in the Rue des Hebdomadiers, it had been decided that they were not the men in question; but no mention of this fact had been made to the counsel for the defence. The dramatic accompaniment of the street-organ was an essential part of the murder scene arranged in the Bancals' house, and therefore M. Juin de Siran made a sign to M. Maynier not to interrupt Romiguières, who went on invoking the musicians.

"Gentlemen of the jury, would you not be appalled if you found that you had sacrificed innocent lives by an over-hasty decision? What answer could you give to the families of all these prisoners, who would dog your footsteps clamouring for the heads of their parents which had fallen beneath the executioner's axe? You know the minds of the people, and that their prejudices of

to-day would be transformed into anger against you."

But this rhetorical outburst failed to move the public, and behind those impassive faces the obstinate conviction remained in every mind that if the hurdy-gurdy players hired by Bastide and Jausion to drown Fualdès' cries had not been found, the reason was that they too had been murdered, and better care had been taken to conceal the bodies than in the case of the ex-public prosecutor. Romiguières was unable to disprove this ridiculous belief, which is still maintained to the present day by the peasants of the Rouergue.

Twenty-four years after the murder when some workmen, digging foundations in a garden which had formerly belonged to Jausion, found some bones and a few rusty fragments, it was unanimously believed in Rodez that these were the skeletons of the hurdy-gurdy players, together with portions of their instruments. And when the law pronounced that all that had been found was some bones forming parts of sheep and pigs, and an old clock key, every one merely remarked that "the law had been deceived." And to-morrow, if any one were to dig up an old chest anywhere in the district, the people of Rodez would rush excitedly to the spot. The street-organs had to be brought in somehow, and the people were convinced that the murderers who were foolish enough to kill Fualdès, and still more foolish as to spare Mme Manzoni, according to all the known canons of crime could not have failed to kill and hide the two missing organ-grinders.

Romiguières was now approaching his peroration and addressed himself chiefly to Didier Fualdès.

"As to you, Fualdès, our chief and most dangerous opponent, surely you do not wish the world even

to hint that you are swayed by unworthy motives. I am only too ready and willing to see in you merely another Hamlet, pursued by his father's blood-stained ghost clamouring for the lives of his executioners. The purer your motives may be, the more carefully you should seek to avoid making a fatal blunder. Look 'round for your father's tried and trusted friends and you will see them, unhappy young man, on the prisoners' bench. Give even one fleeting thought to the agony you are inflicting on their wives! Suppose you are mistaken, suppose you have been misled! When you are seeking to allay a grief so natural and so proper that it even gratifies you to feel it so deeply, beware of falling a victim to remorse whose keenness nothing will ever be able to blunt. Whilst you are trying to appease the spirit of your father, beware of his anger when he sees that instead of his murderers you are sacrificing those who would have saved Fualdès, if any human agency could have saved him."

This exordium drew tears to several eyes, thanks to the bad taste with which it was embellished. The jury began to think seriously, for they were more impressed than they liked to appear, and the impression was not lessened by the speeches of the other counsel for the defence, from Maître Rodier, who made a lucid speech on behalf of Jausion, to Maître Grandet, who took the opportunity of quoting Tacitus and the Pentateuch in his defence of the half-witted Missonnier. By the 7th September the case for the defence was concluded.

The Court was perfectly well aware by now that the case for the prosecution, standing as it were between the impartial attitude of the jury and

the anger of the public, needed some bolstering up. So by virtue of that terrible discretionary power which he was permitted to exercise, the president summoned other witnesses.

And during all this time Mme. Manzoni was never given any peace. It was impressed on her that she had gone too far now to retract, and no secret was made of the threat that if she did not change her attitude she would be prosecuted either for perjury or for complicity in the murder. She was so terrified that at last she herself asked to be recalled, and on the 8th September she reappeared on the stage.

However, she threw no fresh light on the case. She did not faint this time, but merely persisted, as she had done before, but with greater volubility, that she had never been inside the Bancals' house. The scene of the 22nd August was played all over again, and M. Grenier once more summoned the witnesses to whom she had spoken in confidence.

"Virtuous Rodat, worthy son of your father, come hither," he said in the stilted phraseology of a third-rate melodrama.

But the virtuous Rodat only succeeded in making Clarisse say one thing, and that was that she had a secret which she would never reveal, and that all the information which she had given concerning the murder on the 19th March she had derived from Mlle. Rose Pierret.

This woman was continually trying to give a different aspect to the mystery, and now what was going to happen if Edward Enjalran's silent little friend were brought into the case? The fine ladies in the gallery thrilled with excitement. The political drama and the drama of money were to be put aside, as they thought, in favour of some story of

passion and crime. But precautions had been taken to prevent any diversion of that kind.

Mlle Rose Pierret, with her blue eyes and peach-like complexion, entered the witness-box and very artlessly denied everything, and although Mme. Manzon said to her, "Why are you trembling, Rose?" she did not cause the slightest scandal. So she was allowed to go and the attack was resumed on Clarisse, who repeated over and over again, "Even if every one of the prisoners were to say that I went to the Bancals, I would never admit it. My name was used, but I was not there."

Then everybody, even the jurymen, implored her to speak for the sake of her eternal salvation, but this last effort was a complete failure. She still persisted rigidly in her denial, and every one was at last convinced that it was useless to question her any further.

So they had to have recourse to still more witnesses, who contributed the poorest and most trivial details. On the 10th September there was a discussion, for instance, as to whether on the evening of the murder the Bancals had eaten a fowl cooked with rice and a piece of veal—it was sheer bathos.

Owing to the lack of any important evidence the prosecution fell back on rhetoric. Unflagging Maître Merlin, followed by Castan, the attorney-general, in place of M. Juin de Siran, who had become rather half-hearted, led the last attack, and M. Castan supplied the final reason in favour of a verdict of "Guilty." What he said was contemptible, but it was he who carried everything before him.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "it seems that nobody committed this revolting and amazing crime. Here are eleven prisoners and every one

of them is innocent. Hasten, gentlemen of the jury, hasten to set them free, and let us ourselves hasten to break their chains and restore them to their families. Let us close the temple of justice and leave these walls. But when we leave them let us mark the precincts with some solemn inscription which will keep strangers away, for it will warn them that men may be slaughtered like the lower animals, and that the law refrains from overtaking and punishing the murderers, even if their identity be known."

That formed the tragic summing-up of the whole case, and M. Castan made another reference to it as he finished his speech, praising the jury in advance for their severity, and addressing his audience in the fashionable jargon of the day:—

"Inhabitants of Rodez, citizens of Aveyron, leave to these, your representatives, the task of wiping out the insult with which an unpunished crime would stain your honour. You were right to be angry, you were right to call for vengeance . . . In a few moments the satisfaction you have a right to expect will be yours. Your fears shall be allayed, your disquiet be ended, and peace and happiness shall spring up afresh on this soil drenched with your tears."

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This passionate exordium roused the public mind to such fever heat that the counsel for the defence decided to make a counter-attack. Unhappily, it was in doing this that a bomb burst which shattered all their efforts.

It happened on Tuesday, the 11th September, that Maître Romiguières was vigorously conducting the defence and, realising that the strongest argument against his side was the inexplicable attitude

adopted by Mme. Manzon, he resolved to obtain a definite statement from her. For this purpose he made a violent attack on the witness for swearing that although she had actually seen nothing yet she was convinced of the prisoners' guilt, and he added forcibly, "On behalf of my client I insist that you disclose to the court everything that you know. Your contradictory statements, your silence, half-confessions, and your fears have told more against the prisoners than any definite accusation you could have brought against them. They would be in a better plight if the whole truth, however terrible it might prove to be, were to be pronounced by your lips. What prevents you from speaking out, and what do you fear? You are safe and under protection, whereas the prisoners are in chains. . . ."

"They are not *all* in chains!" exclaimed Clarisse Manzon in an appalling voice.

There was a dreadful pause, and Bastide stood up in horrified amaze and with lowering glance searched the faces of the crowd. Those of the spectators nearest to Mme. Manzon gathered round her as if to protect her against imaginary foes. There was some violent jostling in the crowd, and the officer in charge of the territorials lost his presence of mind and shouted "Présent arms!" In a moment the idea had spread like wildfire that there was a huge and widespread conspiracy of which the prisoners were the leaders. The original belief in a political crime, which was firmly implanted in every mind, revived again, together with the firm conviction that if it were allowed to go unpunished fresh excesses would be committed against those who had supported the Republic. The whole basis of the prosecution, so laboriously built up,

was again imperilled, but it was now as impossible for the judges to abandon this line of inquiry as it was for the jury to return a verdict of acquittal.

"The guilty are not all in chains!" That exclamation was capable of several interpretations. Later on Mme. Manzoni used it to accuse some unfortunate people who were clearly innocent, but at that time, in her answer to Romiguières, she may have been alluding merely to Bastide's friends and relatives, who were entreating and perhaps even threatening her on behalf of the accused. Possibly she was hinting at other persons whom she suspected but whose names she could not give; possibly her father's, whispered some people, or her brother's—the one who was in love with silent little Rose Pierret—hinted others, remembering Clarisse's oracular utterance, "I did not go to the Bancals' house, but my name was there. . . ."

Romiguières had been the victim of ill-luck and from that moment his cause was lost. It was in vain that he sought to stem the tide by joining with M. Grenier in trying to extract the names of the murderers. Clarisse only replied, "The truth cannot come from my lips," and that was the end.

The tragedy was rapidly drawing to a close. After Didier Fualdès had expressed his thanks to the police officials, the president of the court delivered that lengthy and entirely impartial statement for the prosecution and defence which has now ceased to be a feature of our criminal procedure. On the 12th September, at half-past twelve, the jury retired to consider their answers to the fifty-one questions that had been put to them, and this occupied them till six o'clock in the evening.

This long interval was most depressing. Mme.

Jausion and her sister, who were both ill, and the Bancal girl had been excused from attending the court, and all the other prisoners sat in strained and gloomy silence. Around them whispered discussions were taking place among the highly wrought audience, and the whole town was also in a state of tense excitement. If such a thing had happened as the acquittal of the prisoners, the probabilities are that they would have fallen victims of the mob and that even the judges and jury would not have escaped public indignation. If a jurymen attended by police happened to leave the court every one sought to read his impassive countenance. They all wished for the verdict of "Guilty," but dreaded to hear it pronounced.

It became dusk, and darkness gradually filled the hall. A few candles were lighted here and there, and beneath their glimmering yellow light the audience surged to and fro like waves of the sea.

The judges and jury took their places again. The foreman of the jury had not the strength to read the harsh pronouncement, so it was the second man, M. Marion Latieule, who delivered the verdict. In an extremely faltering voice he read the series of replies in the affirmative, mostly unanimous, which would send at least five of the accused to the scaffold. Bastide, Jausion, Bach, Colard, and the Bancal woman were pronounced guilty of murder with intent; the half-witted Missonnier and Anne Benoît also guilty but without intent, and Bousquier guilty only of drowning the body. As to the other women, they were declared innocent.

When the verdict was announced to the prisoners and the court had retired to consider the sentences, Jausion gave way to utter despair; whereas Bastide

bore the shock without flinching and merely remarked, "There are many people in this hall whose hearts are beating more quickly than mine." Jausion buried his head in his hands, then stood up and addressed the jury and the spectators, protesting his innocence in the most heartrending tones. Turning to his companions, who sat overwhelmed beneath the crushing verdict, he implored them to tell the truth and say if they had ever seen him in the fatal house of the Bancals.

"What's the use of saying so now?" answered Bach, with a shrug of his shoulders.

Other cries of distress followed Jausion's. Anne Benoît, realising that Colard would be condemned to the guillotine, whither she could not follow him, sobbed out, "I alone am guilty. It was I who kept him at Rodez," and she clung round the ex-soldier's neck, who tried to console her by saying, "Don't cry, Annette. I never fled from the enemy, and I shall walk up to the scaffold as if I were storming a fort."

Into the great hall, filled with gloomy darkness, the magistrates returned and put an end to these sorrowful outbursts. They pronounced sentence of death on five of the prisoners, Bastide, Jausion, Colard, Bach, and Bancal's wife. Anne Benoît and the idiot Missonnier, who was still wondering what it was all about, were condemned to the galleys for life, and Bousquier got off with a year's imprisonment and a fine of fifty francs.

The magistrates then took their departure to the accompaniment of hearty thanks from the authorities and cheering from the people. Fualdès was amply revenged.

And yet did nothing more remain to be said, and had the truth been so strikingly manifested?

Had the prolonged hearing that had now come to an end done anything except to intensify the darkness? Had it not suggested possibilities very disturbing to those who still attached some value to human life? Mme. Manzoni, the principal witness, whose enigmatic words had so swayed the jury, was arrested on the 14th September and was confined in the prison of the Capucins pending a charge of perjury. There was still a tremendous amount of confusion and uneasiness, and in the minds of all the problem was still a long way from being solved.

Like the classical dramas, the Fualdès case was to develop into an actual trilogy, and so far only the first part of it had been played.

CHAPTER X

A NEW STAGE SETTING

MME. MANZON was now a prisoner in the cell which had once belonged to Chabot, before that Capucin monk had become so prominent a figure in the revolutionary party. She was growing somewhat weary of her confinement and was heard to say "I am weeping on the spot where others have cursed." It was undoubtedly at this time that her pose of sentimentality, so reminiscent of Jean Jacques Rousseau, made her seem the most attractive of heroines. All over the country hearts throbbed in sympathy with hers, and shoals of letters poured into her prison, written by foolish young men in the most affectionate terms, and containing eager offers of their heart and hand. But all of these came from the outside world from which she was rigorously kept apart, and the real circumstances of her daily life were less diverting. Moreover, a new inquiry had begun and she was forced to submit to the most searching questions.

What had actually happened was that on the 9th October, three weeks after the trial at Rodez, on the considered judgment of Counsellor Lecontour, the Supreme Court of Appeal had annulled the fantastic decisions of the Aveyron Assizes and sent the prisoners to the Assizes at Tarn.

This decision was delivered to a crowded assembly, and caused little astonishment except among the most ignorant people. There were well-founded

and numerous grounds for the appeal, the chief one being that most of the witnesses had not given their evidence on oath. A blundering clerk of the court had strewn the official reports with foolish mistakes. He was dismissed, and died shortly afterwards, and this increased the uneasiness of the citizens of Rodez, who saw in everything the hand of Bastide and Jausion's accomplices, in fact of all those "who were not in chains."

An unfortunate impression had been created by the lack of gravity and decorum which had characterised the whole of the proceedings at the Assizes of Aveyron. The ill-drawn indictment, the confusion in the evidence, the constant recalling of witnesses who had already been heard, the interference of the son of the dead man and the local authorities, and the repeated questioning of Mme. Manzon had all been prejudicial to the orderly procedure of a court of justice, and it was thought wise to repair the blunder as quickly as possible. The whole of France, soon followed by the Old World and the New, took an active interest in the second trial.

The first essential point was to extort Clarisse Manzon's famous secret, and this duty was entrusted to the examining magistrate, M. Bertrandi. He questioned the prisoner untiringly and made her so nervous that he could get very little out of her; at one time she would refuse to give any answers and sought refuge in the most aggravating dumbness, at another she would treat the matter as a subject for jest.

"My dear sir," she would remark to the judge, "are you not tired of me? I am of you. Do you really want me to speak? Well then, I will. Tell your clerk to write this down."

Then she would rattle off at full speed a flood of useless details, only stopping to put absurd questions to the magistrate with regard to difficult points in grammar or certain sentences from Latin authors. Thereafter she would plunge again at full speed into idle chatter, which she would end up by saying to her inquisitor, amid shrieks of laughter, "*Turpe est mentiri*" (it is wicked to tell lies), or by replying to some urgent question of his, "*Non intelligo*" (I don't understand). In her own mind she had sworn to make a fool of her examiner.

As for the magistrate, he listened to her without a smile and showed the most marvellous patience in putting up with her whims, but he got no reward for his pains, because the prisoner still persisted in her assertion that she had never been inside the Bancals' house. What was more, she made things very awkward for him by giving quite a different version to Counsellor Aubaret, who had come to Rodez to preside at the Autumn Assizes and had been authorised to question her.

With this new examiner she fell back on the story she had told on the 2nd August of the previous year to the Comte d'Estourmel, M. Julien, and her own father. She made out that, on the evening of the 19th March, she chanced to be in what she called the "landing" of the Bancals' house, waiting to meet some one. She had accidentally collided there with a gentleman, booted and spurred and dressed in a dust-coloured cloak and a round hat. He was not the man whom she had intended to meet. She had run away. He had run after her, overtaken her, and observed, "Why are you trembling—I am not a murderer."

They had gone together to that deserted convent mentioned by her during the previous trial. The

man induced her there to tell him her name, which she was vexed at having done, as "it was the first time she had gone out at night." She herself was disguised, not in man's clothes this time, but as a countrywoman in a blue stuff dress, a handkerchief round her neck, an apron and a round head-dress.

Her companion had told her that the Bancals' house bore no good reputation, that he himself had gone there to meet some one, but that he did not on any account want it known that he had been there. He had a knife in his hand, and he made her swear that she would not recognise him again and that she would keep their meeting strictly secret. When he found out that she was the daughter of the president of the Military Court he grew calmer and went away, probably to assist in the drowning of Fualdès. She herself wandered about for some time, paid a visit to some one in the City Square, tried to gain admission to Victoire's dwelling, and ended up by returning to the house where she had furnished lodgings.

This fresh tissue of nonsense, which ought to have satisfied the magistrate's curiosity, only had the effect of subjecting Clarisse to a new series of attacks, of which evidence has only recently been found. Another batch of judges had been appointed who were to force her to speak at all costs. As the case was to be re-tried at the Assizes for the department of the Tarn, it now came within the jurisdiction of the King's Court at Toulouse. So, on the 5th November, a warrant was issued by the chief judge of that court, M. Hocquart, appointing Counsellor de Faydel to preside at the hearing of the case at Alby, four other counsellors to act as judges, and the vice-president and

judge of the Alby Tribunal to act as deputy judges.

M. de Faydel was a magistrate of outstanding intellect and uncommon energy, and he it was of whom Clarisse stood most in awe. The tale she had told M. Aubaret, after M. Bertrandi's continual rebuffs, had served to convince the future president of the Assize Court that there must be some method in existence to compel her to speak. Experience had proved that neither the dramatic outbursts of M. Enjalran nor the weak methods employed by M. Bertrandi were of the slightest avail with her. What was really wanted was subtlety combined with suavity, and firm action joined to charm of manner. M. de Faydel possessed all these qualifications and, moreover, he knew how to handle women. Accompanied by the prefect of the Tarn, who, as it happened, was the brother of the Prime Minister, he went to see Clarisse, who felt that at last she had met with some one stronger than herself.

The president skilfully dismissed all her empty and improbable tales and was successful in making her promise "that she would tell her secret at Alby," and in getting a declaration from her on the spot "that she acknowledged having made an appointment on the evening of the 19th March at the Bancals' house, and that Mlle. Rose Pierret had promised to be there also."

That was enough for him, and Clarisse was not subjected to any further questioning. Nevertheless her thoughts were full of apprehension as she waited in her lonely cell and wondered what use would be made of her involuntary disclosures.

Indeed, she might have yielded to abject despair had not the sudden announcement of a visitor

served to distract her that day from her sadness.

An important visitor, too—no less a personage than a well-known Paris journalist, whom the chaplain, the venerable Abbé Perié, an old family friend of the Enjalrans, had promised to introduce to her.

M. Hyacinthe Thabaud, writing under the name of Henri de Latouche, though at that time only thirty-two years old, was already a man of note. Starting as clerk to a collector of taxes under the Empire, he had written and produced a light play in verse which had served to procure him a post on the staff of the *Constitutionnel*. When, as a result of one of his fiery articles, the *Constitutionnel* had been suppressed, he had written for various other papers, and quite lately he had offered his services to Pillet, the publisher of the *Stenographe Parisien*, for a series of articles on the trial at Rodez. In the town, where the Minister of the Interior had already been informed of his arrival, the presence of this writer, who from afar had scented the great sensation created by the crime in the Rue des Hebdomadiers, formed the chief topic of conversation.

He had asked for an interview with Clarisse, and this was sufficient bait for her vanity. She spent some hours in arranging her toilet and thinking out carefully prepared speeches. Her dress for the occasion was a light blue merino with a dark apron and a red woollen shawl, and on her head she wore a large straw hat trimmed with black ribbons. She had arranged her cell with studied disorder, and with untiring pen had scribbled scraps of prose and verse on scattered sheets of paper. And at last, early on that short November afternoon, she

heard the sound of approaching footsteps in the huge dormitory of the Capucins, the heavy measured paces of her chaplain followed by quicker and halting ones. This sound, which heralded the advent of the great newspaper representative, caused Mme. Manzon to forget all her troubles.

The bolts were withdrawn, the door was opened to admit two people, and just at first Clarisse was somewhat disappointed. The man who was later to be the recipient of the most touching tokens of affection was distinctly ugly and had a most clumsy limp. He was carefully though not elegantly dressed, and through the veneer of his polite manners an underlying vulgarity could be detected. Moreover, the hardness of his keen and searching glance was not at all to the taste of a woman to whom an open and straightforward nature offered no attraction.

Yet, in spite of all this, she was delighted to be the object of universal interest and to have a Parisian man of letters to fascinate as a change from Clémendot and the magistrates. So when the Abbé retired and the ugly little man seated himself on one of the chairs in her cell and stared rudely at her, she adopted a pose of graceful charm and ingenuous simplicity. She began by apologising for the poverty of her abode and then went on in her usual versatile manner to speak of Chabot, her mother, her son, and of Fualdès. . . .

"In this Fualdès affair, madame," observed Latouche at this point, "you are the only person of any interest to writers like myself. Every one else is either a fanatic or a brute, and before meeting you I felt as if I were living in the midst of some savage native tribe in Brazil."

She protested at this, but he continued in

alternately sarcastic and complimentary sentences : " I saw at the very outset that you are the only one who can enlighten our minds. What can you expect from people who are obsessed by such mad ideas ? For instance, the other day they thought they recognised Bancal's pig in the market ; there was an appalling uproar and the crowd threatened to kill it on the spot. These people are mad and are suffering all the time from the wildest delusions. They believe that the prisoners belong to an association of malefactors which has already secured five houses on the outskirts of the town, so that its members may always be able to prove an alibi and continue unscathed their deeds of crime. Even the names of the intended victims are known ; the first of them is to be M. Grelet, the receiver-general of the department, and the worthy official has not had an undisturbed night since the body of some unknown man was found at Alpuech with his head crushed, and the Mayor of Laval-Roquecizièrre was seized by some persons unknown and thrown into the Aveyron."

Latouche's sarcasm amazed Mme. Manzon. It was true that she had no desire to side with the people of Rodez, but she was not accustomed to such freedom of speech.

" Oh, then," she asked, " do you not believe that the prisoners are guilty ? "

" That is for you to tell us," was the reply. " But in any case, even if they are, I have never come across such clumsy idiots."

He burst out laughing, and then becoming serious again he continued : " I should certainly have adopted quite a different theory from that taken up by the magistrates of Rodez."

" What is yours ? "

"Simply that the crime is a purely political one. For instance, the murder of Fualdès might have some connection with the survival of Louis XVII. —people are beginning to say so."

As he uttered these words he gazed fixedly at her.

"Yes, either the son of Louis XVI., after his escape from the Temple had been contrived, or some third party might have given some important papers into the care of the murdered magistrate. The government, knowing about this, would try to recover the papers at all costs."

"It is very unlikely," she remarked, "that any Dauphin would have felt inclined to entrust state documents to a former member of the jury at the revolutionary tribunal."

"Yet it is said that it was Josephine de Beauharnais, with the connivance of Fouché and Duroc, who brought about the escape of Louis XVII. Well then. . . ."

But Clarisse refused to be convinced and retorted, "No, I cannot believe that if Fualdès' murderers had acted on the King's behalf they would have let themselves be seized and convicted in this way. They would have protested loudly till the whole world re-echoed, that they had been nothing but tools in more powerful hands. Bastide and Jausion are not the kind of men to bend their necks meekly to the knife."

"And what if Bastide and Jausion are innocent?"

"I know nothing about that; but, whatever may be the case, they were the only people who had access to Fualdès' papers."

This argument was undeniable, and Latouche shifted his ground.

"I see," he remarked, "that you do not believe

in a political motive for the crime, so let us consider the matter from quite another point of view. It was only yesterday that I learned how in the year 1793 this Fualdès of yours pledged himself to get Charlotte Corday acquitted. At that time he must have been a member of some royalist association, and would have broken his oath had he allowed the avenger of the Girondin party to be led to the scaffold. That was why his former fellow conspirators, the 'Companions of Jehu' or some other royalist secret society, sought him out, pronounced sentence, and carried out his summary execution at the Bancals."

Clarisse pouted.

"I see this theory does not please you any better," declared Latouche, "and yet it is in this direction that they will try to lead you. The Fualdès case is becoming a political matter again. You are probably not acquainted with the precise position of the ministry. It is fighting against the extreme Royalists and making use of every possible means to bring into discredit with the King the electorate which returned the parliament which has just been dissolved. Everywhere those who are opposed to the restoration of the 'Ancien Régime' are helping the ministry in this policy by numerous secret accusations against the extreme royalists. In this case there are more than hints about them; they are openly denounced as being concerned in the murder of the late public prosecutor. Suspicion has fallen on a number of officials, from Constans, the commissary of police, right up to General de Vautré, whose private affairs you have no doubt learned from the aide-de-camp whom I need not name."

Mme. Manzon rose to her feet trembling with

anger and exclaimed, "It is not true. I tell you it is not true!"

"Did I ask you anything?" continued Latouche, quite unmoved. "I am merely telling you what is going on outside the prison, of which you are unaware. You have already seen M. de Faydel, but he has not told you what his own real opinion is. He is far too shrewd a judge to suppose that the motive of robbery, on which the first trial was based, was anything more than a secondary reason. In his view, to a truly logical mind the only possible explanation is to be found in a widespread conspiracy such as I have outlined to you. And do you know what the judge said as he left Rodez? 'It is a tremendous case! The real criminals have not been discovered . . . Mme. Manzon's last words were a real revelation.'"

"What do you mean?" she gasped, in a scarcely audible voice.

"Did you not say that all the murderers were not in chains? That will increase the number of arrests. The names that have already been mentioned are those of M. de Marcillac, M. Maynier, the Crown Prosecutor, the two notaries, Yence and Bessières-Veynac, and that poor Bertrandi of whom you made such fun. If it can only be proved that the Bancals' kitchen could have held them all, there will be some rapid developments."

He was smiling, but his sarcasm did not disturb Clarisse Manzon. She could see that she must put an end to her questioner's skilful deductions, and she would not even admit by her silence that she was at all in favour of the revival of the theory on which he dwelt.

"Sir," she said in her most dignified tone, "I will never be a party to such proceedings. I may

have let fall some ill-chosen words and clumsy phrases. I am not skilled in argument, and since I have been directly implicated in this horrible case, of which I know absolutely nothing, I have drawn up a full statement in my own defence and it shall speak for me."

"That is an excellent idea," replied Latouche. "And to judge by the eloquent and moving letters that we have already heard, it must be a very fine piece of writing."

"Indeed it is not literary fame I am seeking," she declared, very much flattered by his words.

"But you have every qualification for obtaining it. You are a fine musician, your style is striking and convincing, and you write verses."

"How do you know that?"

"Everybody is already repeating the stanza that I can see over there, scratched on your marble mantelpiece."

He proceeded to declaim with pathos these wretchedly poor rhymes, imitated from Florian:—

Whate'er may be my cruel fate
My steadfast heart will bravely bear:
So helpless and unfortunate,
But no one comes my grief to share.

My hands are quite unstained by crime,
Why do ye smirch my honoured name?
Your eyes will fill in briefest time
With tears of self-reproach and shame.

Mme. Manzoni could hardly conceal her gratification. Summoning to her aid all the mock modesty of which she had so great a mastery she confessed, "I should certainly like to write verses, but the

statement for my defence is a very different and more difficult matter. If you would only be so kind as to give me your opinion. . . .”

That was just what Latouche wanted to do. He saw his way to obtaining what he sought, and this interview was turning out even more satisfactory than he had anticipated.

Clarisse picked up some sheets of paper scrawled all over in her bold handwriting, and in the waning light of that autumn afternoon she read them aloud to her absorbed visitor.

To be quite frank it was no masterpiece, but rather a hotch-potch of narrative in which any other than Latouche would have been completely befogged. Mme. Manzoni was bent on proving that it was not she who was in the Bancals' house on the evening of the 19th March, and endeavoured to bolster up her assertion that Rose Pierret was the mysterious woman in the ante-room. As for herself she had spent the whole evening with the Pal household and had gone to bed at ten o'clock, after listening to a pious discourse and taking part in evening prayers in company with the entire family.

Latouche never even flinched or asked how this blameless lady could possibly have taken part in pious readings and discourses in the building she had selected as her abode, at the same time as she had stumbled against a man wearing spurs on the landing of the Bancals' house. He did not care in the least about that, but laid his hand on the manuscript with its large writing.

“This statement is simply wonderful,” he asserted calmly, as soon as she had finished. “You must not hide your light under a bushel—the press must make you known to the whole world. I am prepared

to buy your manuscript on behalf of a famous Paris publisher. What terms shall I ask from him on your behalf ? ”

Clarisse hesitated. To sell a manuscript was not an everyday business at Rodez in the year 1817.

“ What can I ask for it ? ” she inquired. “ Is it worth possibly fifty francs ? ”

He smiled and made no reply, but with quite a courtly bow gallantly offered her a purse containing twenty-five louis. She drew back, hardly believing her eyes.

“ This is only one instalment,” he added. “ Give me your sheets and I will look through them and adapt them to present-day taste. I will also see about the printing and publication, and I take it upon myself to hand you on Pillet’s behalf another two or three thousand francs which will be quite useful as pin-money. Does that suit you ? If it does, we will drop the subject. I dislike discussing money matters with a woman, and especially with a woman like you.”

Clarisse was quite dumb with surprise, and so he kissed her hand and limped away with the precious manuscript in his overcoat pocket. She remained lost in thought, mechanically fingering the few books that she used to read—the *History of Mankind*, an odd volume of the *Works of Massillon*, and a book of fairy tales. This mixture was evidently congenial to a mind which was growing more and more like a second-hand bookstall.

Far away from her, in another part of the prison, the minor sharers in the crime were crowded together ; there was Colard, blond and haughty, Bach, crafty and cunning, Missonnier, as foolish

as ever, wondering why he was no longer being taken into court, and the Bancal woman with her false and cringing looks and bowed by age, poverty, and disgrace.

Bastide and Jausion had been isolated in another building, an old convent of the Franciscans. They were in the company of twenty-three other prisoners, most of whom were in chains and giving vent to groans and angry cries. The dungeon, which had been the refectory of the monks, was a huge place. The two brothers-in-law kept as far away from the others as possible, and, seated on a bench by themselves, ate the scanty meals brought to them by a galley-slave, dragging a cannon-ball at his ankle, who acted as a servant.

Bastide's costume consisted of trousers of a yellowish shade, a blue cotton shirt, a figured velvet waistcoat, coloured tie, blue stockings, and very heavy shoes, and his head was covered with a black silk cap over which he wore a shabby hat. In spite of all he had gone through, he maintained all his pride and undaunted energy. Jausion was more dejected, and seemed almost to be hiding beneath his long gray overcoat and a cap of the same colour pulled down low over his eyes. Sometimes they both shuddered—that was when through the peep-hole in the door or the narrow barred window they happened to catch sight of the inquisitive face of one of their former friends, trying to read on their features signs of shame and despair.

On what did the thoughts of these two men dwell, as they lay in their cell of the Franciscan monastery? As was only natural for unfortunates pursued with such ferocity, they dreamed of escape.

Even before the first trial they had been suspected of an attempt of that sort. Towards the end of

June, on an evening when the prison was in charge of a detachment of the National Guard under the command of 'a sergeant-major of light infantry named M. Dejean, a somewhat curious incident had occurred. As night drew on the turnkey said to M. Dejean, "I feel very tired and I am going to bed, so you must take entire charge."

The hours passed by quite uneventfully. Suddenly a sentry complained that some one was throwing stones at him. The sergeant-major went his rounds, and hearing a sound like the falling of small pebbles wondered if it were a signal. In a corridor Dejean caught sight of a white figure trying to hide and made a thrust with his bayonet at the unexpected vision, which collapsed in a heap. Somebody ran up with a light and recognised the turnkey himself, in his shirt-sleeves and only half-dressed. He had fainted more from fright than anything else, because the bayonet had not wounded him at all seriously. In his hand he still held a key, which was that of Jausion's cell, the prisoner being at that time in solitary confinement. The soldiers rushed in and found the stockbroker lying on his bed fully dressed.

Now, in the November fogs the idea of escape revived anew. The attempt was to be carried out with more care and precaution, but fate was against the prisoners.

For some time past Bastide had occupied himself by making baskets of plaited straw. As he was skilful and energetic and bent on turning his activity to some use, he made them very quickly and sent them home. One day when his wife had obtained permission to see him and was talking to him through the heavy bars of the courtyard she said, "Do not keep on making so many baskets. The

house is already so full that we do not know where to put them."

"Well then," answered her husband, "I will make you an airer to dry your washing. And besides that, there is a young man here who is a fisherman by trade and he is going to teach me to make nets, which later on will be useful to me for catching fish. Send me some twine and wicker."

Mme. Bastide sent the twine and wicker, and the prisoners were allowed to have it. The great hall of the Franciscans immediately afforded the curious sight of all the prisoners busied in making straw plait. Bastide acted as foreman of the workshop, gave out the twine and paid a sou for every piece of a prescribed length.

Eventually the warder Canitrot, who hated the prisoners and kept strict surveillance over them, grew uneasy at this remarkable activity. He noticed that a large quantity of twine was being used and that some of the prisoners, not satisfied with the amount of straw they received, had begun to pull it out of the stuffing of their beds. He kept a closer watch than before and ended by reporting the matter to the Mayor of Rodez.

The mayor, who was always in favour of drastic action, wanted to put the prisoners in irons, but Canitrot had a better idea. He was extremely anxious to catch the prisoners in the act, so he took full responsibility for anything that might happen, saying that he should only ask for help in case of urgent necessity and requesting a force of police to guard the exits of the jail.

During the night of the 3rd December, the guards suddenly rushed into the large cell and were amazed to find that all the prisoners except Jausion had risen and were on the point of making their escape.

Bastide had a portmanteau strapped on to his shoulders like a soldier's kit-bag. On the floor lay a ladder thirty feet in length, firmly constructed of straw plait and wicker. The prisoners had not had quite sufficient time to uncover an ancient opening in the wall, which had been plastered up rather carelessly. Once through this gap, they would have been able to reach the open country.

The Rouergue is full of solitary places, valleys and pools, lonely roads and quarries, caves and brushwood. What would have happened if Bastide and his companions had been successful in plunging into those thickets? He would have become in reality the chief of the brigands he was made out to be, and would have exerted all the strength of his nature against the power of the law. Many of those who were hunting him down now that he was in chains would have become his accomplices. All those united to him either by family ties or political sympathies would have increased his band of supporters and rendered themselves invincible against the law and its agents, whilst the terrified citizens would have protested with all their might that the king's authority had again enabled the murderers of a republican to escape from the hands of justice.

After all these attempts it was not without some trepidation that people contemplated the transfer of the prisoners to Alby, across that hilly country where a sudden attack might be feared. So they hastened to arrange for a strong escort of two picked companies of the Corrèze regiment, comprising a hundred men under the command of a colonel, twenty-five dragoons from the Gironde led by a lieutenant, and two detachments of police

under another lieutenant—all carefully picked men.

Mme. Manzon was the first to leave on the 4th January. M. de Faydel, treating her with the most kindly consideration from which he had good cause to hope for excellent results, allowed her to ride on horseback accompanied by a troop of cavalry, which looked much more like a guard of honour than the escort of a prisoner.

The journey was quite a remarkable and picturesque one. It was true that she had to cover a good twenty-three leagues on the high road in the depths of winter, but Clarisse was courageous and not intimidated by that kind of thing. The first night she slept at Sauveterre, the second at Pampelonne, where she was transferred to the escort of other horsemen belonging to the police of the Tarn—and this gave her an opportunity of bidding the most touching farewells. Not a single soul looked on her as an accomplice of Fualdès' murderers; on the contrary, she was the angel of vengeance on whom justice could depend for its triumph. Crowds ran to meet her and to cheer her, and Clarisse was so delighted with her reception that she did not even hesitate to declare, "I am an angelic visitant—the judge himself said so."

As one goes down from Rodez towards Alby the atmosphere becomes clearer, and even in the depths of winter nature shows herself less severe. The dark purple hues of the Rouergue begin like a symphony in a minor key and end with the bright red of the Tarn and its capital in the major. It seemed to Clarisse that she was coming to a country which would be more sympathetic to her. She put on gay and dashing airs, and even imagined to herself that she was in command of the escort.

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In the ranks of this escort, disguised as a gendarme, rode that remarkable person Bousquier, the man whose evidence had sufficed to give a reasonable basis to the indictment at Rodez, and who bore very cheerfully the punishment inflicted on him for having carried the body of Fualdès to the river Aveyron. He too appeared to be not so much an accomplice in the crime as an indispensable instrument of justice.

This remarkable procession drew nearer to Alby, and suddenly on the 6th January the town came into sight through a gap in the hills—not the whole town but principally its wonderful cathedral, which seemed to dominate the entire landscape. In the great plain, through which there flowed the clear and icy waters of the Tarn, the cathedral rose in one mighty sweep close against the episcopal palace of feudal times. The high cliffs of the river banks added still more to its dizzy height. That strange fortress of brick, of which the noble tower alone showed some graceful ornament, had its slenderness accentuated by the plain lines of the apse without buttresses and by the narrow windows of its single nave. It towered above the town, whose close and winding streets, low mediæval houses, and sordid river quays seemed heaped pell-mell at its feet.

Beneath that clear January sky it was the cathedral alone which filled the vision with its fascinating beauty. Its outline attracted Mme. Manzon and she asked to whom the cathedral was dedicated.

“To Saint Cecilia,” replied the lieutenant, whose horse pranced by her side.

“I like the name. It is that of the patron saint of harmony.”

"All the better," remarked the young officer, "because the house where I am to take you is also called Saint Cecilia."

"I shall be much more comfortable here than at Rodez. Do you know, sir, that the prison I have just left was rather like the infernal region about which Saint Cecilia said, 'It is a loathsome place, wherein one has no friends?'"

So chatting about one subject and another, even about the lives of the saints, Mme. Manzoni and her escort drew near the town, where they were most impatiently awaited. Every one knew of Clarisse's journey on horseback, and stories were current of the fresh proofs she had displayed of her fascinating sentimentality. Had she not induced her attendant cavaliers to go to the aid of a poor woman, whose cart had stuck fast in the snow, and herself given help and consolation? No wonder that a triumphant reception was in store for her.

In the afternoon she made her entry. She rode her bay horse with graceful ease, and her costume was a blue riding habit edged with ermine and a large hat trimmed with white plumes, whilst in her hand she carried a riding whip. Entering the outskirts of the town, she felt that she ought to make a good impression, so she threw back the wide folds of the riding-cloak which the cold had forced her to wear, and did not forget to assume the somewhat melancholy smile which she considered suitable to the occasion.

A crowd pressed close behind her, and the more enthusiastic amongst those who had come to meet her ran at the side of her escort. Ladies leaned out of the windows, handkerchiefs were waved and hats taken off to her. She replied very graciously

to this display of sympathy, and did not remember for a moment that she was accused of a crime and was being taken to prison.

The prison was, however, to be quite a pleasant one, and this had been purposely arranged as a reward for the temporary success obtained by M. Grenier and the Comte d'Estourmel. A comfortable room had been prepared for her, which was soon to become a regular reception salon. Far from being kept in solitary confinement, Mme. Manzon received there any visitors who cared to come. She no longer said, as she had done at Rodez, "I love my liberty too well to try to sing any melodies in this dreary cage"; on the contrary, she showed a great partiality for the harpsichord and for reading romances. In this strange cell it was not uncommon to meet with magistrates who had not come there for the purpose of making any official inquiry, but merely to spend a few hours in the company of this charming woman and admire her melting and pathetic tones.

A few days later, a procession of quite a different kind set out from the prisons of the Capucins and the Franciscans. On the 20th February, at half-past six in the morning, three heavy wagons, creaking ominously, jolted heavily along the cobbled streets of Rodez, surrounded by a strong escort of cavalry and infantry with drawn swords and fixed bayonets. A crowd of volunteers, fearing that a rescue might be attempted, accompanied them for a good part of the journey, brandishing pikes and carrying ancient guns. They did not breathe freely till the prisoners had been handed over to the escort of police from the Tarn. The honour of Aveyron was secure, and the rest they could safely leave to M. de Faydel.

The prisoners, heavily chained, sat inside the clumsy vehicles which moved slowly over the frozen soil, and the thought of escape scarcely entered their minds. Appalled by the strict precautions that had been taken for the journey, they had huddled together right at the back of the wagons. Colard, Bach, and Missonnier were in the first cart, the woman Bancal, with her daughter and Anne Benoît, in the second, Jausion and Bastide in the third. Bastide was the only one of them all who gave vent to his bitter feelings against his native place: "I am leaving without regret a Department which has condemned me so unjustly. I am certain that I shall never return to this accursed country, in which I am sorry that I was born. I go to dwell in a land where men are no longer made to suffer martyrdom."

It was almost a prophesy.

The journey took but two days, as they only halted once at Pampelonne, where the prisoners were received in gloomy silence. When they reached Alby, the woman Bancal, happening to stand by the door, was loudly hissed. And this was but a faint foreshadowing of the shouts of anger in store for them when later they were made to enter a kind of barred cage in which, as they were taken to the tribunal, they were exposed like wild beasts to the blind fury of the populace.

M. de Faydel, the president, M. de Gary, the attorney-general, and M. Decazes, the prefect, set to work without delay. They formed a special force of police to exercise a complete surveillance over the town and the prisons during the conduct of the case. All strangers were carefully shadowed, and several of the inhabitants of Alby who were

too eager in taking the side of the prisoners were severely reprimanded. There was a strong impression everywhere that the case was assuming quite a different aspect, and that steady progress was being made to its ghastly and final issue. The exertions of the judges, 'seconded by Sasmayous' unwearied activity, had produced a whole mass of fresh testimony. This time five hundred people had asked to be allowed to give evidence.

M. de Faydel entrusted to Counsellor Aubaret, formally appointed in the place of the luckless Bertrandi, the task of examining these minor witnesses, while he reserved for himself the examination of the crafty and wretched Bach, the sordid wretch Bancal, and, above all, Mme. Manzoni, hoping to obtain from these prisoners some revelation that would confirm his own theory of the case. What he wanted was some conclusive and substantial facts, not mere suppositions. As a matter of precaution he had had Constans and the girl, Charlotte Arlabosse, arrested for the second time, but as nothing could be proved against them they could not be kept in custody.

He began by examining Clarisse, whose whims had by this time nearly driven to distraction every one who had anything to do with her, including the mayor, the jailers and the officers on duty. Now that she was released from having painful scenes with her father, and her board and lodging were provided, her head became turned by her notoriety and she played all kinds of childish tricks. She had turned from the sermons of Massillon to books of gallantry, and had abandoned fairy tales in order to read the papers which reported all her doings. Her *Memoirs*, re-written and arranged by Latouche, had been published, and there was quite a scramble

for them ; they had an enormous success. In far distant provincial towns, society ladies ceased to talk about fashions in order to discuss the details of the book, and even the business men ceased to take such a keen interest in stock exchange quotations. Not only did everybody search the pamphlet for that wonderful secret which was not to be found in it, but the *Memoirs* gave rise to books written in reply, which indirectly increased her sales and led to the publication of new editions.

Clémendot led the first attack by a paper in which he insulted his former friend by addressing her as Mme. Manzonge (mensonge = a lie). Clarisse, stung to the quick and furiously angry at the way Latouche had entirely altered her style of writing, and still more by the foolish bargain he had induced her to make, yielded to the urgent request of two Alby publishers, Baurens and Rodière, and wrote for them a queer little book entitled, *My Plan of Defence in the Fualdès Case, Appealing to Every Feeling Heart*. The very name is a proof of how difficult it must have been for her to dispense with the assistance of her first editor.

Nevertheless, she launched a lively attack on him but without mentioning his name, just as she attacked all those who had tried to connect her with the case, and she stood by all her denials. She declared that she had committed no crime save that of indiscretion and an irrepressible inclination for gossip ; that she had obeyed her father's commands, and that it was only her weakness that had induced her to sacrifice herself in order to save the life of her brother and the honour of her family, and to keep her little Allah near her. And supposing she did have some secret, what did that matter ?

"However peremptory the voice of justice might be, that of friendship, honour, natural affection and gratitude must reduce it to silence."

Latouche was delighted at these literary quarrels, and his mischief-making activity flooded the Paris news sheets with "thumbnail sketches" of the Aveyron. Later on he also had the portraits published of the principal figures in the trial and substituted very good drawings by Sudre, a pupil of David, for the coarse lithographs in general use. The *Plan of Defence* by his former collaborator rejoiced him exceedingly and gave him an opportunity of recalling himself to her memory which he did not fail to use.

His *Reply by the Sténographe Parisien* was a most cutting one. First he narrated how Mme. Manzoni had sold a few pages of the rough draft of a manuscript for two thousand four hundred francs, and then went on to say: "We acted very fairly towards you, madame. We not only allowed you a profit with which any writer would have been content, but also gave to your work a literary style without which you would often have been in serious difficulties. Do not forget that, and allow yourself to be forgotten."

This last piece of advice was quite useless, and the battle of the books went on. Some of the Aveyron people, annoyed by the freakish journalist, published a *Letter from Mlle. Pierret to M. de la Touche* which was a violent satire against Clarisse, while she rushed into print with two libellous documents, the first, *Mme. Manzoni to the Inhabitants of Rodez, being that Lady's Reply to the "Sténographe Parisien,"* and the other, a *Letter from Mme. Manzoni to Mlle. Rose Pierret*. In Paris, Plancher published *The Mystery of Rodez*, followed

by *The Disclosures of Victoire Redoulez, servant to Madame Enjalran and nurse to Madame Manzoni, and later on also Clarisse Manzoni, or the Black Veil of Rodez Torn Asunder at Aloy*. On all sides people sought to turn it into a business proposition. Lami, a Paris printer and bookseller, offered Mme. Manzoni a commission to write a book "for the instruction of youth." He could not have hit on a better subject; the work was to be called *The Encyclopædia of Misfortune*. A lawyer named Durand asked Clémendot for permission to write a little drama bringing in his relations with Clarisse, and in return Clémendot was to receive a quarter of the amount realised by the sales. It was all sheer madness. All those turgid pamphlets, void of sense and embellished with tragic or pathetic wood-cuts representing penitents, tombs, children in pantalettes and weeping willows, were circulated throughout the whole world. Any Frenchman landing at New York was at once besieged by the question, "How is the Fualdès Case going on?" while the Court of Saint Petersburg awaited the articles of Latouche with an impatience that no political event, however important, could have caused. More and more Clarisse came to be regarded as the heroine of the drama, and this notoriety quite obsessed her. She blossomed out, introduced more business into her part, found new arguments and toyed with her fan and her pen on the steps of the scaffold, entirely oblivious of the fact that the very lives of a small handful of unfortunate people depended on her airs and graces and the pathos she chose to exhibit.

M. de Faydel allowed her to commit herself in this way as deeply as possible, and then brought her back sharply to realities. He gave orders that

she was to be taken to the court, but not till after six o'clock in the evening, with the double object of cheating the curiosity of the crowd and depriving the prisoner of a fresh opportunity for making a triumphal appearance. Directly she appeared before him he spoke in a manner which at once made it quite clear what he expected of her. She had declared explicitly "that she would speak at Alby," and the time had now come to keep her promise.

"Clarisse Enjalran-Manzon," said M. de Faydel to her sternly, "this is the moment chosen by yourself to carry out the promise you made and repeated so often, to reveal the truth. Recall to your mind the exhortations of the Prefect of Aveyron and the entreaties of M. Enjalran, your father, before you left Rodez; and abide by your word. It is seldom that falsehood can prevail, with judges who are determined to ascertain the truth, and to whom the law affords the means of obtaining it. Remember, too, that contradictory statements in which you have involved yourself are usually a sign of guilt, especially when they tend to prove that the accused has some reason for concealment and thus betrays his bad faith. And lastly, bear in mind that perjury is only an aggravation of wrongdoing."

Clarisse was somewhat taken aback and could hardly believe that the president was the same man who at first had treated her so kindly. Beneath his mask of severity she had some difficulty in recognising the features of that delightful man who had charmed her with his courtesy and polished speech. She had still to learn how easily the expert lawyer can change his manner as occasion requires.

So that M. de Faydel, after having earlier assured

her most blandly of the protection of the law, now went on to threaten her with its implacable vengeance.

"The amount of consideration due to you for a double reason has now been paid and it must depend on you whether its source shall now run dry or whether it shall be inexhaustible. You must give up the methods of deceit and evasion which you have hitherto adopted. If you fail to do so, I must warn you that there is a time when moderation becomes weakness, and that it is not fitting for the representatives of the law and the crown to be weak. With the instruments that I have at my disposal it will be possible for me to probe your conscience to its utmost depths. With the means afforded me by the law I owe it to the high office that I hold, to compel you to a steadfast course and force you to keep to it. Reflect well on what I have said, for the law is no respecter of persons."

All this he said quietly and firmly, emphasising by pauses the most effective points. His tone and looks gave weight to his lightest words and allowed her to read into his phrases what he had barely hinted.

As he might easily have foreseen, Clarisse sulked and made no reply, but his blows had struck home.

It was late at night when she left, without having opened her lips. Outside, a kind of impromptu illumination had been made for her. The town council, annoyed at all the stir which had been created in the town, had this year forbidden any kind of carnival mummers before Lent, even in private houses. But the people cared little—the Fualdès case, which was not taken very seriously here, would serve instead of a carnival. As Mme. Manzon passed by, all the windows were lighted

up and all the streets were filled with motley and light-hearted crowds. The police had some difficulty in beating down the torches which people were holding up to Clarisse's sedan-chair in the hope of seeing her face. There was much jostling and laughter, and then, proudly and contentedly, mistress of her fate, Clarisse went back to her prison of Saint Cecilia, under the protection of the patron saint of harmony, in the midst of a torchlight procession.

CHAPTER XI

BACH APPEARS ON THE STAGE

DURING this tragic time, a small grief-stricken house, where the harpsichord was dumb, sheltered a terrified group of women—the wives and sisters of the two chief prisoners. The wives had hardly got over the effect of their long detention, the sisters were chafing at their inability to do anything for their loved ones and exhausted themselves with desperate and futile schemes.

It was only with the appearance of Maître Romiguières that a ray of hope penetrated into that sad household, which was always closely watched. He was spending nearly all his time at Alby, because the assizes had been postponed, first from the 5th February till the 11th March, then till the 25th March. In the evenings, when he had finished his consideration of the procedure that he would adopt for the new trial, and consulted the magistrates and the clerks on doubtful points, or held a consultation with his client—this last under the strictest supervision—even then he did not consider his hard day's work was ended. He would go and see those unhappy women, who awaited him so anxiously, and seek to imbue them with fresh courage and revive his own belief in the justice of his cause by contact with their sincerity and candid innocence.

But one evening, early in the month of March, he knocked at their door at a very late hour. They

were in a piteous state of anxiety, and even Romiguières' arrival did not go far towards reassuring them. Wrapped in his voluminous cloak, with its long cape dripping with the cold, drizzling rain, it was quite evident that he must have been walking about the streets for a long time and had felt uncertain whether to enter the house. The deep frown on his kindly face betokened a discouragement from which up till now he had been immune.

The two bravest of the women, Mme. Vernhes and Mme. Bastide, stood up and went toward him exclaiming, "Here is our friend and saviour!"

He checked them with a gesture that was not quite natural. In that low and gloomy room his tall form loomed gigantic as he sadly replied, "Ladies, call me your saviour no more, for I feel powerless to save any one. I see only too clearly that it is impossible for me to plead again in this appalling case." The women uttered piteous cries like those of wounded animals, and all of them gazed at him in wide-eyed anguish, mutely imploring him to tell them the reason for his desertion of their cause. "For the last week I have felt that this blow was about to fall," he continued, "and I dared not speak to you of it. Everything is lost—the prosecution has obtained a new witness."

The women made a gesture as if to say, "What does one witness more or less matter!" but he went on to explain more definitely.

"This is quite a different thing altogether. It is Bach who has spoken. He declares that he was an eye-witness of it all."

It was only too true, and the prosecution had made a wise choice in selecting Bach from amongst the other supers in the tragedy. Bousquier was no longer any good; now that he had been turned

into a gendarme he had ceased to inspire any confidence. Of the remaining prisoners, Colard and Anne Benoît (a woman courageous even in her disgrace) would have admitted nothing, and Missonnier did not yet understand what it was all about, but there was still Bach.

He had been placed in solitary confinement, and fully appreciated the terrible position in which he had been placed by failing to follow the example of Bousquier. Sentenced to death at Rodez, he already felt upon his neck the keen steel of the guillotine, which would inevitably fall if he were to persist in his plea of innocence. But a confession might save him.

It was not possible for him to rescue the others by asserting his innocence ; it was known already by the evidence of the little girl, Magdelaine, and of Bousquier, and by the dying confession of Bancal, that his share in the crime had not been restricted to carrying the body of M. Fualdès to the river. He had been one of the actual assassins, and already in the wax-work exhibition at Paris his sullen countenance had been displayed to the indignant gaze of the crowd side by side with the masculine features of Clarisse. But he was encouraged to hope for a free pardon if he would only confirm what the prosecution already knew or suspected. The Minister of Justice, consulted semi-officially, had intimated that the pardon would be forthcoming.

Bach had none of Bousquier's scruples. Terrified by the verdict of the Rodez jury he had been desperately anxious to take the first opportunity that offered, and he had done so.

"But what has he said?" the women asked.

"Oh, it was a very simple matter," answered Romiguières. "He had already played a part in

the case. All he needed to do was to tell a story based on that of Bousquier, whilst at the same time trying to clear himself and pretend that he had taken part only in the drowning of the body. Then, having adopted that course, he told everything that was wanted of him—the most improbable things. So we come to the framework of the plot.

First he related how he was taken by Bousquier, on the evening of the 19th March, to the Bancals' house to see some goods which it was suggested he should buy—it was smuggled tobacco; and once there, he was compelled to take part in the dismal funeral rites. Then he elaborated this statement. At Bancal's door he had met three gentlemen who were not there later on, when the body was carried out. He did not identify these gentlemen at the time, but he would recognise them anywhere. Every one at the courts says that they were your relatives, M. Yence and M. Bessières-Veynac, and an inhabitant of Mur-de-Barrez. In this way, you see, we get the important group of conspirators which public opinion calls for. But these are not all, for Bach asserts that in the kitchen he saw many others, amongst whom he recognised Louis Bastide, the two sons of Laqueilhe, and even some people of high standing among the aristocracy. According to the account which he has given so far, there were fifteen people round the table on which Fualdès was put to death."

As he mentioned each name, the women, who were listening eagerly, cried out in indignant protest. Mme. Pons, the most resolute and quick-witted of them, exclaimed, "The whole thing is a ridiculous nightmare!"

"Yes," said Romiguières, "and everybody will believe it simply because it is so ridiculous. But

what I have told you up till now is really nothing. I must ask you to listen to the conclusion."

He drew from his coat pocket the record of the most recent examination of Bach, on which he had scribbled some notes. "This is what Bach actually said," he remarked, and he went on to read the following :—

"On the evening of the 20th March, I met Bancal on the extreme outskirts of the town. He came towards me, saying :

'I am instructed on behalf of Bastide to remind you again that you must not speak about anything that happened yesterday.'

"I replied that they could rely implicitly on my discretion, so long as I was not arrested. When we reached the square, which is a little way from the cathedral, he spoke to me again :

"'Next week we are going to do a good stroke of business, and it will take place in a house quite close to the spot where we are standing. Bastide-Grammont, Bessièrès-Veynae, Yence, Colard, Laqueilhé's sons from Mur-de-Barrez, and myself are some of those concerned in it.'

"He was very insistent that I should join with them in the enterprise, and assured me that I should make a lot out of it without running the slightest risk. I refused Bancal's proposal, and told him that I was already too deeply implicated, and that I would have nothing more to do with his schemes."

"You will say that all this is ridiculous, foolish and inadmissible," continued Romiguères, "that on the very day of the sensational discovery of Fualdès' body, Bastide's 'bandits' should have planned this fresh crime of robbery under arms.

And that this Bach, who according to Bousquier had taken part in a murder on the preceding day for a paltry twenty francs, should have been sufficiently highminded to refuse to take part in a robbery which was to make him wealthy. You can only shrug your shoulders and smile unbelievably, but take heed, ladies, for no one else has smiled at it. Last week, the Supreme Court of Appeal, on grounds of public safety, made an order directing that all persons already known, or hereafter known, to have been concerned in the Fualdès affair should be sent before the magistrate at Alby or the Court of Toulouse for the preliminary investigation, or before the Assizes of the Tarn if they are to be prosecuted. Warrants have already been issued in respect of your relatives and neighbours. Everybody whom the authorities dare to arrest will be confronted by Bach, and it will fare ill with them."

He spoke only too truly. People were thrown into the same state of panic as they had experienced in the previous year.⁶⁰ They searched everywhere, even in their own houses, for those dreadful unknown criminals who had participated in the crime . . . There was a certain René, whom Bach could only describe as being "a well-built man," a lame man "who walked in a funny way," and the three unknown veiled women whom the Bancals' little girl had seen. A feeling of dread pervaded every single member of the clan of the Bastides.

"For several hours I shrank from the dire necessity of telling this to you ladies," said Romiguères to the tearful women who surrounded him. "But to be quite candid, at the present moment the task of defending M. Bastide is beyond my

strength. Such a determined attack has been launched against him that I am quite helpless. Some one else must undertake the task of trying to save him from the scaffold, for I cannot do it. I cannot make the plea which is wanted to move the hearts of the jurors and dispel the thick clouds of prejudice which obsess them. Do you understand me ? ”

The women appeared quite prostrated, and not one of them ventured to reply—they seemed like those on the point of death who feel that they are drawing their last breath.

“ The fact of Bach turning King’s evidence will set the others loose against us too,” the lawyer went on. “ The Bancal woman will quickly follow his example, and the others as well. Eye-witnesses will come forward out of every street. How could any poor words of mine have the power to work a miracle against this monumental mass of cowardice and falsehood ! Even the trumpets of Jericho would fail to be heard ! ”

At this point the poor women broke out into exclamations of complete despair, and every word they uttered was eloquent of their feelings of desolation. They had lived through a year of torture only to see a new abyss yawning at their feet. Could it be possible that the only man who had sustained their hopes and revived their drooping spirits was about to fail them ? No, it was impossible—he would not act like that. He would surely not leave them at the mercy of commonplace advocates, who would be obsequious to the judges, nervous in handling the witnesses, and merely scatter sentences carrying with them no sincerity or conviction.

Romiguières, however, was deaf to all entreaty.

He realised perfectly well that he was doomed to failure, since it was on Bastide, the chief of the brigands, that the fiercest attacks were now being made. Moreover, though he dared not put his thought into words in that mournful assembly, it was just possible that if he were to abandon the young farmer to the most severe penalties of the law, he might yet save the brother-in-law. This was the dire alternative which sealed his lips. The women's thanks for the great service he had already rendered, their repeated assertions of the innocence of their dear ones and their bitter tears all left him apparently unmoved. He might have been made of stone.

Night fell dark and rainy, and at last Mme. Pons, who was more versed than the rest in the intrigues of the courts, took it upon herself to put forward a conclusive argument.

"Why have you become so discouraged?" she asked. "These new arrests of which you have told us will, on the contrary, strengthen our case. Bach is making a formal accusation against Bessières-Veynac, Yence, Louis Bastide, and the Laqueilhès, and is prepared to recognise them, but no one can have any serious doubts of their innocence or dispute their alibi. Therefore is it not a very strong argument in favour of my brother and brother-in-law? If Bach's story is proved to be false in the case of some, is it likely to hold good against others?"

"No, it is not," Romiguières admitted at last, "provided that they are all arraigned together before the Assizes."

"What else can be done?"

A lawyer, however lofty his intellect and however great his anxieties, is always interested in questions of procedure. Romiguières thought over the

position. It was quite apparent from the investigations and the trial at Rodez, that the judiciary would trouble little about the rules of procedure if those rules embarrassed them. Nevertheless, as Mme. Pons said, it was hardly possible for them to treat separately two cases, which were not only connected together, but in fact constituted one and the same case. In so serious and difficult a matter, where the principal accused were making so strong a defence, and the statements of the less important prisoners and of Mme. Manzoni needed to be so severely scrutinised, it would surely be necessary to try all the prisoners together. The innocence or guilt of some of them must affect the position of the others, since there were the same witnesses against them all. Could he possibly stand aside and see Bastide, Jausion, and Colard condemned to death and actually executed, before those who were alleged to be their accomplices had been tried? The principles of equity, the obligation to elicit the true facts, the spirit of article 433 of the Criminal Code, the clear terms of the order just made by the Supreme Court—all combined to make it essential that the whole case should be dealt with together and the fate of all the accused decided at the same time; and in that event, even at this late hour, there might yet be a chance of saving the innocent.

Maître Romiguières rose and walked up and down, turning the matter over in his mind and uttering from time to time a few half-finished sentences to which the women listened eagerly as they waited for his decision.

Eleven o'clock sounded from an old clock with discordant jangle. The lawyer ceased his restless pacing. "Very well," he said, "we will make a

last effort. I consent to appear in this second trial."

They all clustered round him and Mme Bastide pressed his hands and kissed them. "Wait," he said, "I will appear against Bach—I will appear against this Bancal woman."

"Thank you, thank you," they cried.

"But if Mme. Manzon does definitely give evidence against us, if she repeats the tales by which she has won so much renown, if she makes the same disturbance as she did at Rodez, which so wrought on the jury, then you must not rely upon me. In face of that woman I shall be powerless. There is only one way in which I could unmask the intrigues of those of whom she is the tool, and in my position as a lawyer I cannot adopt that way. Are you willing to have my services on those terms and run that risk? I should honestly be thankful if you refused to do so. I would gladly hand over to any one of my colleagues this difficult case, which we shall never get really cleared up."

But they did not hesitate for a moment, and accepted his terms with the greatest thankfulness, for they felt that the withdrawal of Romiguières would have been the final blow. They dried their tears, counted up again the possible chances of success, and the brilliant advocate, harassed but deeply moved and yielding to their persistence, faced steadily and courageously the heavy task which lay before him.

CHAPTER XII

THE CLIMAX AT ALBY

ALL courts of justice look very much alike, and in this one at Alby there had been erected right at the back of the hall a large gallery for ladies, resembling the one that had been so conspicuous and popular at Rodez. Here, too, there was a great throng in the body of the hall and outside the court, but it was not pervaded by the same tense excitement. At Rodez the spectators were the local populace, fanatically convinced of the guilt of the accused and coming to the trial as to some savage rite that could only end by the death of the victims ; here at Alby the spectators were gathered from all parts—there were even some from Paris, for the whole world was watching the proceedings with interest rather than with passion. In the front row of the reporters' seats was Latouche, representing the *Moniteur* ; he wore a purple coat with a velvet collar and wide revers, black kerseymere trousers, a high collar and a shaggy broad-brimmed hat. There were also well-known composers and painters among the audience. The Fualdès case was no longer a theme for small paragraphs in the newspapers ; it filled columns and had attained to the dignity of headlines.

The hearing commenced at half-past eleven in the morning of the 25th March. The setting, though less imposing than at Rodez, was nevertheless very well designed. The prisoners had been

conveyed to the law courts in a cage like that used for wild beasts, which seems incredible to us, but was unfortunately only too true. Bastide and Jausion were loaded with heavy chains on their arms and necks, whereas Bach, Colard, Missonnier, Anne Benoît, and the woman Bancal were only lightly handcuffed. Their accomplice, Mme. Manzoni, arrived in a sedan-chair, wearing a yellow merino dress and a light shawl, and on her head a black straw hat gracefully draped with a veil. Thus already in the public mind they were arranged in a descending scale of guilt.

There was no sign of the new prisoners. The night before, in pursuance of the course he had laid down for himself, Romiguières had striven hard to prevent the authorities from proceeding with the trial, and on behalf of the accused had applied for an adjournment until a decision had been reached as to whether a formal charge should be laid against the latest suspects. The public prosecutor had simply asked the president of the court to rule that the application was ill-founded, and M. de Faydel had ruled accordingly. At the beginning of the new trial the counsel for the defence in vain demanded the reading of the warrant which sent the new suspects for examination elsewhere, and on behalf of the prisoners challenged the president's ruling as *ultra vires*. They were listened to impatiently, their objections were overruled and the court ordered that the case should proceed.

In spite of all this the proceedings were not so heated as before, and Bastide was allowed to make his replies, and sometimes they were quite witty ones, without interruption, and to argue with the witnesses and Didier. Not a single member of the

jury, who were all quite prominent men, was challenged by the counsel for the defence. None of the counsel, except Romiguières, had taken part in the earlier trial, and consequently their speeches were not so openly prejudiced. And yet the trial was moving inevitably towards the conviction of the accused.

First of all a large number of new witnesses gave evidence. These had not been selected with very great care, for some of them even made mistakes in mentioning the prisoners by name, and stupidly confused them with one another. Some, it was quite clear, exaggerated in giving their evidence, as for instance a certain beggar who, in an attempt to break down Bastide's alibi, declared that he knew the curé of Tioullières intimately and that he had dined and "slept with him." Others merely furnished details which had absolutely no bearing on the case. For instance, one worthy old dame, merely stated that she was over eighty years of age and enjoyed very good health.

But at last, from amongst all this welter of foolish babble, there emerged the statement of a young man named Théron, who appeared for the first time and gave deadly evidence against the prisoners.

He stated that on the 19th March, 1817, just before eleven o'clock at night, as he was returning from setting fishing snares in the river Aveyron and was walking in the direction of Rodez, he heard the procession of murderers approaching. He hid behind a bush and saw them pass by in the dark; Bastide walked first with his gun in his hand, the barrel pointing to the ground, then came the body carried on a hurdle, and Jausion brought up the rear, with a kind of white kerchief fastened round his head beneath his hat and falling over his eyes.

It was such a gruesome sight that he, Théron, took off his shoes and ran away at full speed. He must certainly have run for a long time, since he did not stop till he got to the Assize Court at Alby.

This tardy and unexpected evidence raised a storm of angry questions and protests from the prisoners.

“ Why did you not speak sooner ? ”

“ How could you have seen us on a dark night without a moon and in the open country ? ”

“ Did you recognise us then ? ”

“ You lie ! ”

How often these reproachful cries must have sounded in Théron's ears ! Three years later he was stricken by a fatal malady and sent for Abbé Carcenac, the Vicar of St. Amans-de-Rodez, a venerable priest who had escaped from the perils of the Revolution, and made confession of his perjury. Like Bousquier, who died three weeks before him, Théron signed a confession, which was as follows :—

“ I, the undersigned, Jean-Baptiste Théron, being dangerously ill and on the point of appearing before the judgment seat of God, wish to appease the remorse of my conscience and do an act of justice by retracting the wicked perjury I committed when giving evidence at Alby against Jausion, Bastide, Colard, Bach, and Bancal. I said that I had recognised these five people in the lane known as the Capoulade, carrying the dead body of M. Fualdès down to the Aveyron. I solemnly declare that there was not a word of truth in my statement.

“ Given at Rodez, the 22nd December, 1821.”

But before remorse had urged him to this

confession he had been instrumental in sending some of those unfortunates to the guillotine.

He was not the only damning witness ; on the 13th April the woman Bancal followed Bach's example and decided to speak in order to save her own life.

She adopted the same crafty line as those who had preceded her, endeavouring to accuse the others and clear herself. Her tale was very similar to Bousquier's, but with variations and additions which, in fact, only served to demonstrate the falsity of her statement.

Amongst the murderers she had recognised Bastide, one of his nephews whose name she did not know, Bach, Colard and a new conspirator subsequently lost sight of, "who looked like a Spaniard." According to her, Anne Benoît was not present, and Colard, after bringing in M. Fualdès, had gone out again and taken no part in the actual murder. As regards Jausion she could not make any statement, but she believed that she saw Charlotte Arlabosse, the girl whom Bastide had playfully threatened to murder. As for herself, her husband had sent her away before the murder took place, and she was on the stairs outside the room all the time that M. Fualdès was bleeding to death. She had not even seen Mme. Manzon.

This was the miserable and incoherent story told by the wretched woman, who was like a wild beast trapped and seeking clumsily to escape the hunter's knife. It was not much liked or believed, because it did not implicate Jausion ; but Bach's second narrative, which was as unscrupulous as it was false, simply staggered his hearers.

The smuggler was evidently fully determined to maintain and elaborate that idea of a conspiracy

which dominated all the proceedings at Alby. The only complaint that could be made against him was that he was almost too eager to do so.

"On the 18th March, about ten o'clock in the morning," he said, "Yence d'Istournet, Bessières-Veynac, Louis Bastide, and René came up to me in the City Square and invited me to go with them to the Foiral, telling me they had something very special to say to me privately. I followed them, and when we came to the trees on the promenade they proposed that I should take part in a robbery which they were planning to carry out at M. de France's house. The time was fixed for that very evening."

At this point M. de France, who was waiting to be called as a witness, could not restrain a genuine start of dismay. This band of conspirators was incredibly daring; on the 18th M. de France, on the 19th M. Fualdès, on the 20th M. Grelet were to be the victims—it was becoming impossible to breathe freely in the Aveyron district. It was such plans as these that were discussed at ten o'clock in the morning in the Foiral by three notaries, "a gentleman of handsome appearance," and a smuggler—and it was the virtuous smuggler who gave the others a lesson in honesty!

"They offered me," said Bach, "it was Yence who made the offer, the sum of twelve hundred francs if I would give them my help in carrying out their plan, but I refused."

This was nobly spoken by a man who the next day was prepared to cut Fualdès' throat for a louis, for he now confessed to his share in the murder, together with the twelve accomplices whose names he had already mentioned. And he went on to give all the details of the murder that the case for

the prosecution could possibly need. The Bancal woman had apparently exculpated Jausion, but Bach's circumstantial evidence was to destroy him.

"I noticed Jausion holding a morocco leather portfolio, on the back of which I saw a small yellow plate which formed the fastening. The colour of the portfolio was either red or blue, but I cannot be quite sure on that point. M. Fualdès had already signed some deeds, and he signed some more in my presence; there were some twelve to fifteen in all. When that was done Jausion collected all the papers and put them in the portfolio I have mentioned and thrust it into his pocket.

"M. Fualdès had scarcely finished signing the deeds when Bastide-Grammont announced to him that he must die. M. Fualdès started, rose to his feet, and addressing Bastide in the most moving tones said: 'Is it in the bounds of human possibility that my own kinsman and friends are in league with my murderers?'

"The only reply made by Bastide-Grammont was an attempt to seize M. Fualdès and lift him on to the table where he had just signed the papers. All the others present came to Bastide's help, while Fualdès struggled violently. In the midst of the efforts he was making to defend himself I heard him ask for a moment's respite to make his peace with God, and it was Bastide-Grammont who replied, 'You can make your peace with the devil!'

"At last Fualdès' resistance was overcome and he was laid full length on the table. Jausion, who had a knife in his hand, struck the first blow."

At these words a shudder of horror ran through the court—it was the first time that Jausion had been so categorically accused. No other account

of the crime had ever tallied so well with the theory conceived by popular imagination.

This account, so badly constructed, so full of improbabilities and inconsistencies, put forward so late on the eve of the final verdict, has kept its place as the basis of historical narratives novels, and melodramas. In these, after Jausion's ill-directed blow, there appear Fualdès knocking over the table and rushing towards the door, and Bastide dragging him back and slaying him without pity. Clarisse Manzon in male costume is discovered in the famous scullery and pulled forward into that horrible kitchen. There is the notorious remark of Jausion to Bastide, "You have already got one body to deal with, what will you do with the other?"

Bach's story is thus constantly repeated. The tale told by this miserable wretch of Rodez has spread throughout the world, and the romance of which he was the author achieved a fame that time has not yet obliterated.

Only one of the judges expressed any doubt as to the story, and he was promptly silenced by the others. He was a certain M. Pinaud, a prisoner under the Terror, a scholar of the old type but receptive of all new ideas. Two years later, as permanent secretary of the Academy of Floral Games, he was to have a correspondence of great value in the history of our literature with a young poet of remarkable powers, M. Victor Hugo, a native of Besançon. And at this time his highly critical frame of mind prevented him from accepting at the outset all statements either of the accused or of the witnesses for the prosecution. And so during the earlier sittings of the court he intervened several times in the examination of the witnesses,

in order to probe the truth of their statements and the nature of their bias.

He was ill-advised. Doubt was not permitted. The Minister of Justice was at once informed of his attitude. Some days later, in the very middle of the night, M. Pinaud was aroused from his sleep and forced to listen in the presence of his colleagues to a harsh reprimand brought in all haste by a courier from the ministry. The poor man was quite intimidated, and did not say a word during the rest of the trial. Thenceforward there was no obstacle to the course of justice.

In the meantime what had happened to Mme. Manzon? At the beginning of the new trial she had recourse to extreme reticence, which was hard on the prisoners and annoying to the public. It angered Romiguières, who, in accordance with his well thought-out scheme, wished to get her out of the way before it came to the speeches, as he was still apprehensive of an outburst from her like that at Rodez. So after consultation with Maître Dubernard, Jausson's counsel, he decided to drive her at once to extremes, and for that purpose to let the prisoners themselves ask her the most searching questions. On the 3rd April they advised the prisoners to take that dangerous course, which they did without hesitation.

It was a bold act, for in accordance with the promise made before her departure for Alby, Clarisse was already becoming more talkative. The whole situation tended to make her so; she was no longer simply a witness, she was an accessory whose position, still quite tolerable, might suddenly become difficult—M. de Faydel had warned her of that. Moreover her husband had now obtained a separation order, and she was in immediate danger

of being deprived of her son and her married name, and of finding herself without means of any kind, and so for the time being her only hope lay in doing exactly what the prosecution wanted.

On the 30th March, when she was first examined, she had admitted that she had been to the Bancals' house, but her admission was made in jerky and hesitating phrases.

"I took shelter in the passage of a house, which I have since found was Bancal's. . . . I was seized and dragged in . . . I said, 'I am a woman,' because I was disguised. I was forced into a tiny room. I heard a noise and groans . . . I was overcome with terror and fainted . . . Soon after I heard a noise again, and it seems that I was dragged out . . . I saw a great number of men . . . I did not recognise anybody."

Then she began her old game and fainted, but she did not get from the police the same attention as from Major-General Desperrières. They let her fall full length on the floor, and everybody thought, "that she must have hurt herself rather badly."

When she came to, with the help of the smelling-salts which on such occasions she used alternately with *Eau des Carmes*, her examination was continued.

"Did you hear any groans?" asked M. de Faydel.

"Yes, groans and stifled cries . . . 'I heard the blood dripping into a bucket.'"

A shudder of disgust ran through the spectators.

"I was afraid of my life. . . . I tried to open a window to escape, but it was too high; I struck myself and made my nose bleed, and I fainted again."

Now, however, she asserted that she had not seen any one, and in explanation of her silence on this

point she handed to the president some strange threatening letters which she found everywhere, she said, in her sedan-chair and even among the flowers in the garden of a clergy-house, where she had been allowed to take her walks.

Here is one :—

“ You have spoken, but beware. They are not all in chains. We shall know how to reach you. Sooner or later you and your son will die by the knife or poison. Death awaits you both.”

Here is another :—

“ Pay heed to a last warning. Keep silence. The day on which you give evidence will be the last of your son’s life. Choose between denial of everything, and death. Say that the president threatened you ; you will be looked after and protected against everything. Think of your oath ; think of your son whose fate is in your hands. Fear her who writes to you ; you know her. The knife is ready. You must deny everything or perish.”

Where did these letters come from ? Probably from this remarkable perjurer herself, for finally she did speak and was never at any time in danger of being murdered. In fact, she lived quite peacefully in enjoyment of the state pension which she had so well earned. Or they might have come from relatives of Bastide and Jausion, for instance, from the energetic Mme Pons, in an effort to alarm her and reduce her to silence. However this may be, in spite of the severe strictures of M. de Faydel, she did keep silent till the 3rd April.

On that day the proceedings began with a

statement from a certain M. Blanc de Bourines, who repeated some compromising remarks which Mme. Manzon had let fall. She contradicted herself, quibbled, and prevaricated. Then Maître Dubernard sprang up and exclaimed:—

“I implore you, madame, in the name of God who sees you and is your judge”—he pointed to the crucifix—“tell us the whole truth.”

Immediately Bastide, realising that this was the crisis so long desired by the defence, cried out in his turn, “Yes, let her tell the truth!”

“Wretch!” exclaimed Mme. Manzon, in the tragic tone for which she was so justly renowned.

“We have had enough of that, madame—speak out!”

Then there was a most remarkable and dramatic scene. The enigmatic daughter of the house of Enjalran darted like a snake at Bastide. She thrust aside the police who surrounded her ostensibly to protect her against her enemies, and with flashing eyes and trembling lips she hissed, “Look at me, Bastide. Do you recognise me?”

“No. I do not know you.”

“Wretch! It was you who threatened to murder me.”

At this accusation, which was equivalent to his death sentence, there was a tremendous uproar. Every one sprang to their feet, their cheeks grew pale and the icy hand of tragedy clutched at their hearts. Then suddenly, unchecked by the president, there broke out loud and prolonged applause, which spread beyond the confines of the court and told the whole town that Fualdès would assuredly be avenged.

Didier was the first to put further questions to the witness.

"Madame," he cried eagerly, "you have spoken the whole truth about the prisoner Bastide, and I implore you to tell it about all the others. I ask you especially about the prisoner Jausion—I ask it for the sake of God whose name has been invoked to-day."

But Mme. Manzoni was evidently exhausted, and could not utter another word. Even though the hearing was suspended for half an hour in order to give her time to recover, she would say nothing more. So eventually the case was adjourned till the next day.

When the court was empty, the lawyers, quite unhinged, hastened to the prison.

"Come, Bastide," said Romiguières, with his habitual bluntness, "you can no longer persist in your denials now that Clarisse Manzoni has deprived you of any chance of escape. You must confess, for there is nothing else left for you to do."

Meantime, Maître Dubernard, in pursuance of a plan arranged beforehand with Romiguières, was saying earnestly to Jausion:—

"It is all over. Bastide has just confessed his guilt to Romiguières. You must follow his example."

But the two brothers-in-law were quite unmoved and did not flinch.

"They can all say what they like, I am none the less innocent," was Grammont's reply.

And the stockbroker also declared, "Bastide is innocent—he has nothing to confess."

Unfortunately for them, Mme. Manzoni did not confine herself to this one melodramatic outburst; this time she had resolutely adopted a certain course from which she would not deviate. At the subsequent hearings she did not follow her usual

policy of recantation. She asserted, possibly sarcastically, that on the 19th March "there were a great many people at the Bancals' house," and when she was accused of contradicting herself her answer was, "I declared that I would tell the truth at Alby."

On the 8th April, Romiguières questioned her about the evidence of her cousin Rodat, and tried to entrap her by an indirect attack.

"This witness says that Mme. Manzon told him that just as the unfortunate Fualdès was on the point of being murdered he begged to say a prayer, and that he was refused. Mme. Manzon must explain this. She must either confirm M. Amans Rodat's statement or contradict it. Up to now in her evidence against my client she has spoken only of an agonising cry, and after all that is something quite different from the entreaty M. Fualdès is supposed to have made."

"The counsel for Bastide," said the president to Clarisse, "asks you to explain how it came to your knowledge that the unfortunate Fualdès was prevented from saying a last prayer."

"I heard it myself," she answered. "Is M. Romiguières satisfied?"

"Mme. Manzon asks me if I am satisfied," returned the lawyer, rising to his feet. "I shall always be satisfied as long as she speaks the truth. Her assertion that a murderer said something blasphemous when M. Fualdès wished to pray is not sufficient for me. It is no longer as counsel for Bastide, but as a man and a citizen that I ask who it was that refused the victim the favour he begged?"

"It was Bastide," she cried without hesitation.

Henceforward she no longer fainted or burst into tears. She had changed into a kind of fury determined on the ruin of Bastide. She disputed every inch of ground with the prisoner, with Counsellor Pinaud, the witnesses and the lawyers, and adhered resolutely to all her statements.

This proved the final blow, and Romigières withdrew from the case.

Nevertheless, the witnesses for the defence did not lose heart, but stood in close formation and delivered a last attack. In spite of threats launched at them from the judges' bench—and warrants were issued against several of them—these unhappy people stood firm. Even the Saavedras, the Spanish couple who lodged with the Bancals, came forward at last and declared that on the 19th March "they had not left their room and had heard nothing except the Bancals' children saying their prayers, as they always did at night, and then going up the stairs which led to their bedroom."

The prosecution, however, had been careful to weaken all this evidence by bringing up witnesses beforehand to make statements diametrically opposed to it. For instance, against the Saavedra husband and wife they opposed some reported statements of another Spaniard named Roca-Lillo, who had not even been present at the trial, but at any rate he gave the public prosecutor grounds for saying, "This woman is deceiving us. As the room she occupied was immediately above the Bancals' kitchen and only separated from it by flooring with holes in it, it is impossible that she could have heard nothing of the noise sworn to by the woman Bancal, Mme. Manzon, and Bach, and that the victim's groans which penetrated to the street did not reach her ears. I ask that this be duly noted,

so that a prosecution for perjury can be instituted against her."

Nevertheless, the two Spaniards persisted in their denial right up to the moment when the husband, the poor exiled judge, tired of seeing himself disbelieved, went wearily away saying: "*Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles* (He has put down the mighty from their seats and has exalted the lowly)," which only excited much laughter.

The only time when the spectators were moved to any extent in favour of the prisoners was when Mme. Vernhes appeared to give evidence. The poor woman's grief had turned to despair. She had great difficulty in obtaining a hearing on account of her close connection with Bastide, and she swore with most touching sincerity that her brother-in-law had spent the night of the 19th March, 1817, at Gros.

"But are you sure you are not mistaken, Madame?" said the president to her. "In the course of the proceedings we have heard a very great deal of evidence which seems to make it quite clear that Bastide was at Rodez on the evening of the 19th March."

"Sir, whatever oath I might be called on to take, even if I were called on to pledge my life for the truth of my statement, I would maintain to my very last breath that Bastide is innocent and that he did not leave us that night."

"A large number of witnesses, on whose word we can depend, have sworn to the contrary."

"They are all liars!"

These words were received with violent uproar, but Mme. Vernhes, pale and trembling, went on unheeding:—

"Sir, we have only our servants who can bear

witness to my brother-in-law's presence at Gros. It was decreed by fate that we had no one outside the family with us on that particular day. If we had, our poor Bastide would not be on the prisoners' bench. We are in the most cruel plight. I have given you all the details I can, and I implore you to take them into consideration and have pity on Bastide, who is as innocent as an angel from heaven. Those who accuse him have perjured themselves."

"Restrain yourself, madame," interrupted M. de Faydel, who was anxious to quell the increasing tumult. "That accusation might also be made against you, and there are no false witnesses here."

Then the poor woman went away, choking with sobs and apologising for her boldness; and as she departed she tried to catch a glimpse of the big man, who sat with his head in his hands weeping also, and bent beneath the weight of his chains, and she said mechanically, "Oh, heavens! I shall never see him again!"

The final speeches were opened on the 23rd April with an address to the court by Didier Fualdès, and a lengthy rhetorical elaboration of it by Maître Tajan of Toulouse, who had succeeded Maître Merlin as counsel for the intervener. The public prosecutor, Maître de Gary, made an elaborate summing up of the case for the prosecution, in which he skilfully brought together all the evidence, and did not omit to deal with certain attempts which had been made by the relatives of the accused to bribe the witnesses or the warders. At the end of his speech his tone became milder, and he declared that justice was content with the admissions made by Mme. Manzoni and would not oppose her discharge from custody. He trusted that she would

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pass from that place into the arms of that devoted mother who longed for her, and that her life in the future would be distinguished by its devotion to filial duty." Clarisse listened to these quasi-paternal counsels with deep emotion and many tears at the right places; and altogether it was a very touching sight.

On the 28th April the other counsel had their turn, but their efforts call for no description. A significant thing was the silence of Romiguières. He did as he had said; Mme. Manzoni had made an explicit statement, and there was nothing left for him now but to keep silence.

When the galleries were full and the whole assembly thrilled, he rose and said, "The prisoner Bastide asks to be allowed to address the court."

Bastide was already on his feet, some papers in his hand. With head bent and with his staring eyes fixed upon his manuscript, reading carefully the speech on which his very life depended, he began:—

"Gentlemen,—My counsel has struggled with great difficulty against my ill fortune. He has helped me with his advice.

"I ask nothing more from him for the present.

"No one can possibly be more certain than I am of my innocence, but I alone can declare how certain that is.

"There are some crimes of which the authors remain undiscovered because Providence reserves to itself their punishment. There are others where its inscrutable will makes sport of human weakness, sets in men's minds those blind prejudices which are the cause of many judicial blunders, and gives to those who are innocent the appearance of guilt. Nevertheless, it does not wrong mankind so far as to deprive the more wise

among them of that swift insight which shows them how mistaken the others are.

"Has there ever been a case in which the mass of evidence has imposed so great a task upon the defence?

"The more general aspects of the case will be dealt with by the counsel for the other accused, and I associate myself with all that they may say.

"Now, so far as I am personally concerned, I need not go through the story of my life. Few people of my age have given so little scope for calumny. One single accusation may seem to mar my early life, but my father has protested against it, and those who lend so complaisant an ear to the prattle of a child will surely not refuse to heed a father's words.

"Yet I am accused of having murdered my old friend, a man whose affection for me was so great that it caused us both to forget the difference in our ages.

"What is the evidence?

"M. de Parlan believes that he saw me on the 17th or 18th March drinking in a public place with Bach and Colard. But on the 18th that was impossible, because one of the witnesses had evidently already gone at the time when, according to the other witness and the waiter Labro, I am supposed to have been seen in the Café de Ferrand.

"On the 19th March I am alleged to have made an appointment with Fualdès for eight o'clock in the evening. Cazals had stated this at the preliminary inquiry. At the Assize Court at Rodez, Ursula Pavillon gave evidence about a remark of mine which she had entirely forgotten when she first gave evidence.

"Now, three new witnesses assert the same thing, but unfortunately for them the greater their number the more absurd their story becomes. Who can believe that on five separate occasions, in five different places but almost at the very same moment, I should have made

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openly, and in a voice so loud as to be overheard, an appointment with M. Fualdès which was to be so fatal to him.

"But why should I trouble myself about these earlier events, when six persons assert that they saw me either committing or completing the crime? I answer, that merely to name the subordinate witnesses for the prosecution is sufficient to show how little reliance can be placed upon them.

"What of Bousquier? A prisoner who strives to excuse himself by throwing the blame on others. He is sufficiently clever to steal the torch of truth whilst professing to add to its light. An impostor who denies everything at first, and even by making every possible call upon his imagination only very gradually produces a narrative which accuses me—is my fate to be in his hands?"

"What of Bach, and the woman Bancal? Prison walls do not speak. But one day they will speak, and will tell of all the intrigues woven to induce these wretched beings to use perjury as a weapon to protect their dishonoured lives. . . ."

At this point M. Faydel became somewhat restless. What Bastide had said appeared to him to be a direct attack on the methods employed by the prosecution. He interrupted sharply:—

"Describe the intrigues and the methods you assume to have been adopted in the prison. Say what it is that those walls will one day reveal."

But the burly prisoner could only read his speech; he could not argue. So he went on:—

"But to-day it is enough to point out that they were incited by the success of Bousquier's revelations. It is enough to point out the incoherence of their

statements, and the fact that one of them had not the courage to inculcate himself, whilst the confession made by the other is stamped all over with sordid improbabilities, and that they leave us completely in ignorance as to the causes of the crime, the arrangements for it, and the circumstances in which it took place.

"What can I say in my own defence against this woman, Clarisse Manzon, who is at the same time witness, accuser, and accused, whom blind prejudice alternately scolds and flatters, who is either pitilessly humiliated or extolled in the most extravagant terms, and who, in order that she may not be degraded by justice, has forced justice to degrade itself for her . . . ?"

This was too much. Bastide was reading what the lawyer Romiguières could not have ventured to say.

"Bastide," asked M. de Faydel very sternly, "is this written defence you are reading your own work ?"

"The groundwork of it is my own," he replied.

"Do not put yourself in the wrong and rouse public indignation still more."

The big man shrugged his shoulders and continued :—

"My defence lies entirely in that statement made by Clarisse Manzon at Alby and which she now declares to be false. What guarantee did she give you of her good faith when she added, 'I will tell the truth at Alby ?'

"I need not examine the explanations which must be accepted if credence is to be given to Théron's statement. I need not examine them, for in themselves they do less to aggravate the case against myself than to shake the conviction of my judges, for these judges

will surely say, 'Through the darkness and obscurity of the night, Théron managed to distinguish Bastide, Colard, Bancal, and Bach. He saw Jausion, in spite of the handkerchief which hid his face; he saw two guns and even the way in which they were carried; he saw the woollen blankets; he saw the corpse. It is too much to believe—Théron saw nothing!'

"Finally we come to Magdelaine Bancal. When the child was questioned by the examining magistrate on the 24th March she knew nothing. Since then she has become the most active tool of a horrible intrigue which time alone will reveal but of which the authors have already betrayed themselves. Let us call to mind the undisputed evidence of Canitrot. They decided to see whether Magdelaine could identify Bastide, so first of all they took her into Bastide's cell!

"But if I were innocent why should I persist in denying my presence in Rodez on the morning of the 20th March? My persistent denial had one simple cause—I was at Rodez only in the evening. The violence of the prosecution, the statements of a thousand witnesses could not wring from me an admission on that point, even if I could have made it without any danger to myself, and if truth could speak with two voices. But truth will out, whatever efforts be made to cloak it. I am supposed to have been seen at the same time in several places and in various garbs. I am supposed to have kept myself concealed, until yet in the space of two hours to have crossed the main square of Rodez some thirty times. And though I was known to all the people who saw me, only one spoke to me, and that one witness happened to be Fualdès' maid-servant. Were even the most subtle mind to pride itself on harmonising all these discords, an intelligent man can see nothing but a most evident confusion of days and times.

"So I am perfectly justified in calling on better-informed witnesses, those who really do know me and who saw me—because they talked to me. They are not mistaken about the times, because we are treating not merely of a fleeting moment, but of a whole evening and a whole morning spent with them or near to them. They are not mistaken about the day, because the arrival of the sheriff's officer fixed it for certain in their minds. Neither does their memory play them false, because instead of making a statement six months or a year after the murder like most of the witnesses for the prosecution, they were examined a few hours after my arrest.

"People say contemptuously that these are merely the witnesses for the defence. It is the law which summoned them to my help, and it is not the place of the magistrates to brand them with reproach.

"You say they are only servants. The Curé of Saint-Meymes, M. de Courlande, Mme. Vernhes, the miller of La Gascarie and several others cannot be placed in that category. Even of those to whom that name may be applied—and it is no disgrace—only one is in my service at the present time. And besides, what a lack of logic is shown! Does one imagine that servants, who are so cruelly despised, are noble enough to sacrifice their own safety for the sake of their former employer?

"You say they are false witnesses. If that can be proved I will be silent. But when to the rashness of such a statement you add the treacherous cruelty of suppressing facts, the proofs that are given are strong enough to gain belief. Who would dare to formulate the axiom that twenty-nine witnesses for the defence are of no weight in the scales of justice? Who would dare to stand against the overwhelming

reproach of having doubted a fact attested by twenty-nine witnesses?

"And what is the reason for this homicidal unbelief? It is simply due to the determination to prove that I murdered Fualdès."

"Fualdès was no enemy of mine, whereas his death was the result of some deadly act of revenge."

"Fualdès was not my creditor, for you surely will not agree that a simple remark can be twisted into implying the existence of some legal indebtedness, nor will you believe that a man who was in the habit of constantly borrowing small sums of money could be in a position to lend ten thousand francs to a friend who was standing surety for him."

"If it had been greed of gain that had led astray a man as abstemious, as hardworking, and as well-to-do as myself, and urged me to violence, should I have been so foolish as to strike down an old man whose fortune was insufficient to incite any one to robbery? Should I have enlisted the help of those low-class, dangerous and useless hired assassins? Am I likely to have dragged my victim into a notorious house in a crowded part of the town, when Fualdès invited me constantly to his house, and had such complete confidence in me that he would have followed me into the most dense and lonely woods?"

"As for these men and women who are supposed to have been my confederates, I never even knew them. Either they committed the crime without me or I committed it without them. If you must find a victim I am ready, but do not connect me in any way with either Bach or Bancal."

"Above all, do not involve my innocent kinsfolk in my downfall. The hateful ambition of interested parties has pretended to expose dangerous plots in order to gain credit for discovering them, and so my

family, which has always dwelt in the country, versed only in rustic customs and fond of a simple life, is represented as forming a centre of conspiracy and a den of crime. Cruel persecutors, you have beheld the grief and ruin of my dear ones. Three of them are dead in their prime, and their death was due to their affection for me ; three more are languishing in prison, victims of the cruel fate which is closing round me. Such are the machinations of my foes !

“ Judge for yourselves, gentlemen, if it is possible for one who has been cast into a sea of troubles still to cling to life. I take God to witness, who judges me more wisely than men and has bestowed on me this power of steadfast endurance which my enemies fail to understand, that it is only my honour I seek to guard. The way in which my defence has been hampered, my thirteen months’ solitary confinement, the inhuman treatment to which I have been subjected, the refusal to treat together two investigations which are fundamentally inseparable, the way in which several persons whose evidence I might have called on were intimidated, all this has delivered me defenceless to my foes. I call upon you, who have learning and knowledge of the duties of your high office, to imitate that rare wisdom of the judges of old which was cited as an example by the Roman orator, and judge the witnesses before you judge the prisoner.

“ And if after all I must still submit to the injustice of human beings, I make my appeal to a future not far distant which will engrave upon my tomb these words : ‘ Bastide was innocent ! ’ ”

This was the remarkable defence, somewhat marred by the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, put forward by the accused. It was heard in stony silence, except by the judges. At the end of the

proceedings the public prosecutor, who thought that the reference to Mme. Manzoni was directed against the fatherly kindness with which he had treated her on the previous day, made a violent protest against the speech. He also quoted a few of the boldest passages such as :—

“ The way in which my defence has been hampered. . . . ”

“ The refusal to treat together two investigations which are fundamentally inseparable. . . . ”

“ The hateful ambition of interested parties has pretended to expose dangerous plots in order to gain credit for discovering them. . . . ”

These innuendoes were not to be endured. At the request of the prosecuting magistrate, President de Faydel ordered that the text of Bastide's defence should be immediately handed to the court, and that the accused should give the name of the real author. There was much agitation among the red-robed judges. Just for a moment there was some attempt to snatch the paper from their hands, but it was recovered, and they concentrated their attention on avenging the insult that had been offered them.

This was indeed remarkable if one considers that their anger was directed against a man who was about to be guillotined. But as a matter of fact it was not against him they sought revenge, but against his lawyer. Romiguières was duly reprimanded and forced to repudiate the outrageous document and put the entire responsibility of it on to Bastide. But it was not this defence which was to bring about Bastide's ruin.

The speeches of counsel lasted from the 28th

April to the 2nd May. After all the counsel had been heard, the intervener, interrupted by cries and protests from Jausion, made an impassioned reply, and the Baron de Gary then proceeded to demonstrate to the jury that all they were asked to do was merely to formulate what he described as "their general impression."

"In our trials by jury," he said, "it is no longer a question of legal conviction, that is to say of a conviction based on logic, but only of a conviction based on the impression formed by the jurors. As you know, gentlemen, the law does not lay down any rules as regards the abundance and sufficiency of a proof; it does not say to you, 'You must accept as true a fact sworn to by such and such a number of witnesses.' It enjoins on you to question yourselves in silence and seclusion. It puts to you only this one question, 'Are you satisfied in your own minds?'"

But before the jury were called on to state the conclusions reached in this manner—obviously a very unsafe method—there was an endless amount of thrust and counter-thrust. On the 2nd May, Maître Dubernard having replied for Jausion, M. de Gary answered him again and the stockbroker's counsel retorted forthwith. However, at last, after a speech by Maître Bole on Colard's behalf, the final questions were put to the prisoners and the court adjourned.

Two days later, on Monday the 4th May, the verdict was pronounced, but not until seven o'clock in the evening. This time also there was a tragic scene, with Bastide unmoved, Jausion in despair, Anne Benoît hanging round her lover's neck, the woman Bancal as silent and gloomy as ever. . . . But this time it was not on a short September

evening in a town throbbing with excitement, and with the whole population shaken by fear and hate as at Rodez. Here the surroundings were altogether different, and the emotions of those who had attended the interminable sittings of the court were already blunted.

Nevertheless, the public desire for vengeance was satiated. The court again pronounced the death penalty in five cases, those of Bastide, Jausion, the Bancal woman, Colard, and Bach ; and Anne Benoît was condemned to penal servitude for life. But this time Missonnier got off lightly ; the blunder of the Court of Aveyron, which had sent the idiot youth to the galleys, was not repeated. Two years imprisonment and a fine of fifty francs was thought sufficient punishment for his share in the imaginary drowning ; but still he did not know what it was all about.

Of course, Mme. Manzon was acquitted, but she was kept in detention for the purposes of the third investigation which was now taking place. An effort was made to secure a reprieve for La Bancal and Bach, and in view of the importance of his evidence the latter was recommended to the king's mercy.

This was not the end of the oratory, for the next day in an almost empty court the tribunal awarded to Didier Fualdès sixty thousand francs damages, to be charged on the goods of those who had been convicted, on condition that this amount was used by him to meet the debts due from his father's estate. But he was not able to get the full advantage of that award, since assignments had already been made of the property and it could consequently not be attached. The court then placed on record Romiguières' repudiation of the statement read by

Bastide which had so much annoyed M. de Faydel and M. de Gary, and reprimanded Maître Bole, because in the course of the trial he had said, "I appeal in this matter to public opinion." It was proper that he should be made to understand at the beginning of his career, that he must not so far forget himself during a trial. Finally, the public prosecutor expressed his thanks to everybody, but particularly to M. Decazes, the prefect, the municipal authorities and the citizens of Alby, who, as a matter of fact, were conspicuous by their absence. The judges were perfectly satisfied, and came away from the trial proud of having once more done what they called their duty.

All those who had been convicted, with the exception of Missonnier, hastened to lodge an appeal, but this time with very little hope of success.

The city of Alby, so feverishly excited for four months, now sank back into its accustomed lethargy, and awaited calmly the date fixed for the executions.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW THEY MET THEIR DEATH

LESS than a month afterwards, on Wednesday the 3rd June, a day of moist and thundery heat, the townsfolk of Alby were again roused to excitement. The cause of this was a rumour which had spread through the town, that the crown prosecutor had received by special messenger on the preceding evening, at half-past ten, the decision of the Supreme Court rejecting the appeal of the accused. This time all the necessary formalities appeared to have been strictly observed.

Consequently, from early in the morning large numbers of people had begun to gather round the St. Cecilia prison, like animals scenting a trail of blood. They had need of patience, for it was not till eleven o'clock that Cussac, the clerk of the court, was seen to enter the building, evidently greatly impressed by his own importance. The heavy gates closed behind him. The prison maintained its silent and sullen aspect, and the spectators could let their imagination play freely on the moving and despairing scenes, the cries and futile outbursts, which were taking place within. But in truth nothing of the kind was happening.

Three only of the condemned were to meet their fate now, for Bach and the woman had been respited in order that their evidence might be used against the other accused persons who were still awaiting

their trial in the prisons of Alby. But it was hopeless to expect anything from Bastide, Jausion, or Colard, except that their death would serve to lay the ghost of M. Fualdès. They themselves had fully realised this, and so they received without surprise the message brought by Cussac. Bastide was very cast down and had lost all trace of that bantering humour which had so often annoyed the judges and the witnesses; Colard, for the first time, was in tears. Jausion was the only one of the three who was quietly resigned to his fate.

Whilst waiting for that terrible day their thoughts had turned to that future state on which they were about to enter. The day after the judgment of the Assize Court they had asked for the good offices of the dean of the cathedral, but he had refused to be their confessor, since his high rank would not allow him to administer spiritual consolation to criminals such as these. The ordinary chaplains of the prison were good enough for them. Their request for the services of a lawyer to make their wills had also been refused, since they were regarded as outcasts. They submitted to this injustice without complaint.

Nevertheless, if it were in any way possible, they must not be allowed to die without making some statement. • There was still a hope of extracting some confession even at the foot of the scaffold. Towards midday the crowd, which was constantly increasing in the square, made a passage for M. Pagan, one of the counsellors attached to the tribunal, who came to have a separate interview with each of the condemned men.

He first saw Jausion. "I have come," he said, "to ask you in the name of the Supreme Judge not to attempt longer to conceal the truth. Your

persistent perjury only intensifies your crime and cannot delay your punishment."

The broker simply ignored the magistrate's eloquence. With lips firmly closed and steady gaze, he maintained silence. At last he produced a fragment of paper covered with writing and answered, "Sir, I die an innocent man, and for the honour of my family I request that a record be made of my final protest," and in a firm voice he dictated to a clerk the statement that he had drawn up:—

"I am about to appear before the Supreme Judge. The statement which I now make is the absolute truth, for falsehood would be of no avail to save my unhappy life. I am innocent. I had no share in the death of Fualdès. I was his friend. At no time did I have any design to murder him. For many years past I have not been in the house inhabited by the Bancals. I did not frequent houses of ill-fame. On the evening of the 19th March I had supper in my own home. It has been proved that I did not go out that evening. I cannot definitely point to the murderers of Fualdès; I know none of them, but I have had some suspicions. Fualdès had personal enemies made during the recent interregnum. Some persons whom he had prosecuted during the Hundred Days had sworn to destroy him. It was owing to his action that M. de P—— and some other people at Espalion had been put in prison there. He had under surveillance the elder Laqueilhe of Mur-de-Barrez, and the latter's eldest son had vowed revenge. I do not say that I am sure that these persons were the murderers of Fualdès, but they were certainly his enemies, and it is among them that justice should seek the authors of the crime.

"Not one of the witnesses ever saw me in the

Bancals' house. The story told by Bach is unworthy of any credence. He did not know me by sight and I did not know him. I have nothing more to say, but I ask you to convey to my family what I have now said to you. I declare to my wife and children that I shall die an innocent man."

It was clearly of no use to press Jausion further. M. Pagan left him and went to Bastide's cell. There again he failed to obtain any result. The big man did nothing except hand to the magistrate his final protest, which set out the main arguments used on his behalf during the trial and ended thus :—

"The last words of a dying man are sacred, and so I beg you to write them down and convey them to my family. I solemnly assert their absolute truth. I declare to my wife and all my relatives that I die an innocent man."

Colard said much the same, and the magistrate, quite at a loss, had to yield place to the chaplains. These, besides hearing the last confession of the accused, were entrusted by them with the putting right of some business matters which had occurred before the Fualdès case, but as regards the murder they learned nothing.

During this time the agitation in the town steadily increased. From early morning the military sentries had been doubled, and every possible precaution had been taken to make certain that the death sentence would be carried out in the course of the day. About three o'clock two strong bodies of troops marched into the square where the guillotine had been set up, whilst another detachment was drawn up facing the prison. Mounted police closed

all the approaches. The crowd had been driven back, and there passed to and fro over the empty space only grave, pompous and busy magistrates and officers of the guard. Over the whole scene lowered a leaden-coloured sky.

Inside the prison they were getting the condemned men ready for the execution, and listening curiously to hear their last words.

Bastide, huddled in a chair with his energies all spent, murmured in a feeble voice :—

“ I pray that when I die innocent, my blood may atone for any faults in my life. Neither I myself nor any one belonging to me has been associated in the remotest degree with the murder of Fualdès.”

Jausion took off his stockings and handed them, together with his watch, to the warder of the prison, with the request that they might be delivered to his family. It was with an aspect calm and free from all earthly passions that he said to those present while he was being pinioned :—

“ I entreat you to pray to God for me . . . I am innocent . . . I know nothing of the murder of M. Fualdès . . . I authorise you to tell every one that I am innocent . . .” and he repeated several times, “ I authorise you to tell them so. . . .”

The only words Colard was heard to say from time to time were, “ God have mercy on me !”

At half-past four a start was made, and as the condemned men were stationed between the two doors of the prison, Bastide turned to his brother-in-law and said :—

“ My dear Jausion, you know that I was not always on the best of terms with you. If at any time I have given you cause for offence I ask you to forgive me.”

“ My dear Bastide,” answered his friend, “ I

forgive you with all my heart—let us forgive one another.”

They walked forward with a firm step. The prison gates had been opened on to a wide space filled with sunshine. Soldiers stood with drawn swords near a cart which was waiting. A deep silence reigned all around. The three men came down the steps. Bastide and Colard were bare-headed, while Jausion had on a cap with the brim drawn down over his eyes.

“Let us go,” said the big man. “Since we cannot find justice on earth let us seek it in heaven.”

They all climbed into the funeral cart, the prisoners in the middle and the priests at either end. The Abbé Rivière was next to Jausion and the Abbé Chatard by the side of Bastide; each of them held a crucifix in his hand and exhorted the prisoners in simple and moving terms to repent of their sins. Every one in the crowd felt deeply touched, and not a single jeer or angry word was addressed to the victims. Several of the spectators even went so far as to ask one another with concern whether hardened criminals could meet their death so calmly as this.

Their courage upheld them to the very end. Jausion was the only one of the three to address the crowd before submitting his neck to the knife. He appealed to God and man, and said that reliance ought to be placed on the declaration of a man on the verge of death, and that his last words were surely worthy of belief. Once again he protested his innocence and forgave all those who were causing him to perish on the scaffold. He was the first to give himself into the hands of the executioners.

Colard was the second, and he did not say a

single word. Bastide, the last victim, made no public speech of any kind, but with simple religious emotion murmured the versicle from the Service of Compline: *In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum* (Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit). The sound of a third heavy thud was heard and the spectators, gazing in silent and petrified horror, beheld a third bleeding torso of more powerful build than the two others fall prostrate to the earth, and it seemed as if the blood of the victims added a more sanguinary hue to the purple and red sunset of the long-drawn-out June evening.

At the very same hour, Mme. Clarisse Manzon, her mind at rest, was sitting at her harpsichord and singing in pathetic strains an air from the opera, "*False Magic*."

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It was not till the next day that the Abbé Chatard could summon up courage to go and break the cruel tidings to the two widows and the sisters of the deceased. He asked the Abbé Pujol, a devoted friend of the family, to accompany him on this gloomy visit.

The cruel state of affliction in which these poor women were living is hardly conceivable. Jausion's mother and two of Bastide's nephews having already succumbed owing to strain and grief, they themselves were dragging on their existence surrounded by all the cruel paraphernalia of mourning, and now these two kindly men had to inflict on them the harshest blow of all, and were sorely puzzled how to set about it.

The prison chaplain of Alby was hardly equal to the occasion. He was still suffering from the

overwhelming strain of the previous day, and climbing the steps of the scaffold had sapped his strength. At the house he was seized by sudden weakness and sank down on the staircase, so the Abbé Pujol had to enter the room alone.

His unexpected arrival, the ravages of grief on his face and the tears that he could not check were sufficient without any words from him to tell the unhappy widows and those with them the cruel truth. They had fought such a desperate battle that up till the last minute they had hoped against hope, and now in one moment they guessed the blow that had befallen them, but could as yet hardly realise it.

After a few minutes' struggle against the troubled confusion of his mind, the priest gained sufficient control over his emotions to lift to a higher plane the desolate grief of the pious Christians who were listening to him, by telling them of the last moments of their dearly loved ones. It was like a heavenly ray of light cast athwart the sombre clouds of life by the inspiring power of the Cross . . . And the little group of dark-clad mourners, with hands clasped and eyes raised to heaven, repeated amidst their sobs :—

“ They were innocent . . . They died as martyrs . . . They are in heaven.”

The same day, M. Decazes, the prefect, wrote to the Comte d'Estourmel this letter, which calls for no comment whatsoever :—

“ Our rascals have gone below. As Christians we ought to say, ‘ May heaven receive their souls,’ and so undoubtedly I hope it will, but it is rather beyond my power to believe it.

“ Our priests, however, have no doubt on the matter,

because Jausion received complete absolution. Do you not think it is annoying that in this matter the affairs of this world should be kept separate from those of the next? The public confession of their crime ought to have been made an essential condition of their absolution."

CHAPTER XIV

THE EPILOGUE

NEARLY fifteen months before the events which have just been recorded, on the 19th March, 1817, at three o'clock in the afternoon, two men on horseback left Rodez and went in the direction of Rignac, the birthplace of the worthy M. Manzon. They had by no means the appearance of men setting out on any adventure, one being a lawyer, Maître Bessières-Veynac, and the other a doctor named Auzouy. They were leaving Rodez on business which they proceeded to discuss leisurely as the early evening drew in, and the pale yellow rays of the setting sun brought out the contrast between the open countenance of the young lawyer and the rather more serious face of the doctor.

As night fell they arrived at Laborie and sought a night's lodging at the Galys, who were the doctor's cousins. M. Delpech, Justice of the Peace in the district of Sauveterre, and his daughter-in-law were guests there as well. They met with a most cordial reception, but as it was a Wednesday in Lent they could not be very lavishly entertained. So these good Catholics partook of a frugal repast and spent the rest of the evening in cheerful conversation. About eleven o'clock the party broke up, but since the house was not very large, M. Bessières-Veynac and Auzouy shared a room with two beds in it.

Having thus passed the night together, the

lawyer and doctor mounted their horses at seven o'clock the next morning. Two hours later they arrived at Rignac, where, as it happened, they chanced to meet several persons of repute, including the curé and the commandant of police ; then they continued on their way, arriving eventually at Dr. Galtié's house at Mas-de-Mansiat where they met many of their friends, one of whom, in fact, had gone there in connection with the transfer of some property of which the deed of assignment was drawn up on that very day. There was a great deal of business being done at Mas and in the neighbourhood of Rignac. Maître Bessièrès-Veynac lingered there—he was quite evidently enjoying the awakening of springtime. He only returned to Rodez in time to hear the two staggering pieces of news of the murder of Fualdès and the arrest of his Uncle Bastide.

A little outing of country lawyers, rustic hospitality, the old-fashioned courtesy practised in the province of days gone by—this it was which fortunately saved the life of young Bessièrès-Veynac, that ardent member of a Catholic lay brotherhood. It was quite clear that providence was watching over him, since the four informers, Bousquier, Bach, the woman Bancal, and Mme. Manzon were already prepared to identify him, and declare that they saw this young follower of Bastide standing by the side of Fualdès' dead body. If on that fatal night he had slept at his own house, he would have incurred certain ruin.

At the same date another lawyer was also saved by his profession. This was honest Yence of Istournet. He had drawn up several deeds during the mid-Lent fair at the house of M. Dornes, the deputy public prosecutor, where he interviewed

his clients. On the day when the crime was committed, he had fortunately been inspired to invite M. Dornes of Crupinquet, the magistrate's own brother, to dine with him that same evening at his house, which was about a league distant from Rodez, in order to discuss some business matter. His guest was ahead of him and arrived at Istournet about half-past six in the evening. Three-quarters of an hour later, or an hour later at the outside, Maître Yence arrived home and met him; they sat down to dinner, talked for some time together and went to bed about eleven o'clock. The next morning they went to a place named Bousquet to value a piece of land which M. Dornes wanted to sell. They went to breakfast together to the purchaser's house, and did not separate till towards the end of the afternoon.

Such were the peaceful occupations of these respectable professional men during that ill-fated night, yet, notwithstanding, they too were formally accused of the crime and might easily have laid down their lives on the scaffold.

And last of all, there was a third lawyer who was supposed to belong to the "bandits," as if the criminal investigation department had sworn to make a clean sweep of all the lawyers' offices in the district. This was Louis Bastide, own brother to the man who was executed, and against whom no accusation had been made except in Bach's insane tissue of lies. He was an honest scrivener, tall and strong like his brother, somewhat uncouth in manner but with sound rustic qualities. Living quietly at Ranc in the district of Millau, he had never been conspicuous for anything except his frugality, steadiness, and hard work. But what did that matter—he was arrested just like the others.

Their examination was prolonged throughout the gloomy summer of 1818. But in spite of the unswerving conviction of some of the judges and of Didier Fualdès, the passion for investigation was becoming half-hearted, and public opinion, so all-powerful, was less excited. There had been enough bloodshed, and those who were already executed had met their death with such resignation and courage, and even with nobility. There was no longer that atmosphere of feverish hate in which the two parties had fought for a whole year. Now, people wanted to see more clearly, or at least only to advance on firm ground; and this time, in spite of the crushing accusations which were even more definite than those in the first case, it was the spirit of critical analysis, so long repudiated, which carried all before it.

At the end of October, a most unpleasant scene, which took place in the examining magistrate's private room, set Maître Louis Bastide free.

The wretched Bach was confronted with him, but hesitated to identify him. It is not known what lingering remnant of truthfulness kept him from doing so, but on that day the lawyer could not restrain himself when he saw once more the man who had dragged his brother to the guillotine. Overcome with grief and anger he spat furiously in the other's face.

"So that's what you do?" shrieked Bach, wrought to sudden fury.

"Well, listen to this. I declare that up to now I have not told the whole truth to the judge; but you most certainly were among the murderers of M. Fualdès. I saw you there and I recognise you perfectly. I may have to mount the scaffold myself, but if I do you shall follow me, my fine gentleman!"

What would have happened to Maître Bastide a year earlier? But times had changed since then, and Bach was no longer the arbiter of life and death for those unfortunate people with whom he was confronted. The judges acted this time as they themselves thought proper, and the lawyer was set free again.

But, alas, in what a piteous state he found his household! His business was ruined, his private means gravely embarrassed, his two children dead from grief during his eight months in prison. So much trouble and such ill-fortune shook his reason, that the unfortunate man became insane.

Had the last name been added to the list of victims, and was M. Fualdès now sufficiently avenged?

The answer was by no means certain, because from the 21st December, 1818, till the 15th January, 1819, a third case was tried at the Assize Court of the Tarn, at which the accused were Constans, Bessièrès-Veynac, and Yence. It was a case of no particular interest except in so far as it reflected back and cast a remarkable light on the gloomy drama that had preceded it.

Everything was different this time—the judges, jury, even public opinion. The spectators were not so numerous or so easily moved, and calmness prevailed once more in the temple of justice. M. de Gary, however, the prosecutor for the Crown, who was still fired by his success in the first case, conducted the second series of prosecutions with an equal amount of enthusiasm.

Nevertheless, it was quite impossible for him any longer to base his case upon the imposing theory of a conspiracy of the extreme royalists,

which threatened public security through all the south of France. In that respect he was faced with insuperable obstacles; for that, he would need to be able to prove the complicity of representatives of the highest ranks of the "White" army, of the gendarmerie, and of the aristocracy. Consequently he had to abandon any attempt of the kind and be content with suggesting some inferior person, such as the unfortunate commissary of police. Yet without the support of his chiefs, what could have been the inducement for such a man to stop or impede the prosecution, to protect the Bancal woman, or to favour Bastide and his accomplices?

As regards the two country lawyers it was a different matter. They had been accused on account of their kinship with Bastide, and particularly of their eagerness in his defence; but as it was scarcely possible to suggest that motive any more than the conspiracy idea, M. de Gary fell back again upon allegations as to mercenary inducements to the crime.

It was supposed, quite without evidence, that Jean Joseph Yence had given notes of hand to Fualdès, and as his business affairs were in great confusion, he had been delighted to seize the opportunity of destroying all the evidence of his indebtedness and the security which he had given in respect of it. Bessières-Veynac, it was alleged, had already spent more than twice his modest fortune, and his anxiety as to the future had driven him, under the influence of Bastide, into a criminal course.

These allegations were maintained by a whole host of witnesses for the prosecution, who had been collected by Sasmayous and let themselves go with great violence. The greater number of

them were of no account; some admitted that they had been delighted to have the chance of earning some money by giving evidence at Alby. Some were so little acquainted with what had already taken place that when asked to identify Yence, they pointed to quite innocent onlookers or even at the hapless Constans. But others were much more dangerous witnesses, and that group was dominated by the redoubtable trio who had already set the guillotine in action—the Bancal woman, Bach, and Mme. Manzon.

The sight of the Bancal woman and Bach, both of whom had escaped the death penalty, made the spectators shudder; this was particularly true of the former, who looked like a ghost. She had been so close to death that at times she herself felt as if she had left this life behind her, and there came from her withered lips in a hollow unearthly voice strange and dreadful accusations, as, for instance, that on the day after the murder of Fualdès, Jausion had given her some bread containing poison so that she could rid herself of her children who might betray everything. . . . But the public was no longer inclined to accept statements of this kind.

She then re-told the same horrible and unsavoury tale as before, but refused to accuse the prisoners categorically. She believed that she had seen Yence among the murderers, but she avoided saying anything about Bessières-Veynac.

"And yet you did recognise him on the 5th of last June," demurred Counsellor de Miègeville, the president of the court.

"I lied then when I said that I recognised him," she answered, still in that hollow, mournful voice. "At that time I was very harassed; I was threatened with the guillotine, and it served my purpose to

persist in that story. But to-day I will tell the truth and keep to it."

As for Bach, he did not hesitate at all. He felt a fiendish delight in playing his villainous part, and declared that he had with his own eyes seen Yence and Bessières in the Bancals' kitchen at the time when they were both away from Rodez.

"Bach," exclaimed Didier Fualdès amidst the general excitement produced by Bach's words, "the sword of justice is hanging over your head. It is fitting that you should now learn that after the last trial I joined in the efforts of the judges and jury to obtain for you the king's clemency and the mitigation of your punishment. I do not ask a life for a life, but only for lawful retribution. If you have concealed the truth until this day, tell it now to the God who hears you; tell it to the judges, to the gentlemen of the jury, to this whole community which hangs upon your words. Bach, on my own behalf, I implore you to tell the truth. I am the son of the man whom you murdered. Speak freely. Tell us if Yence and Bessières-Veynac were among the assassins. If there is anything you ought to say in favour of the accused to mitigate their share in that wicked deed, do not hesitate. I entreat you to tell us the truth."

And the smuggler, quite unmoved, answered, "Yes, sir, Yence and Bessières-Veynac *were* there—that is the absolute truth."

He had saved himself before by answers of that kind, and he persisted in them with the simple cunning of an animal. And as he spoke, some of his auditors recalled with foreboding the effect of his previous statements.

Mme. Manzon was still worse. Although it was the middle of December, she wore the straw hat

draped with a flowing veil which had helped her on previous occasions to make such a brilliant impression, a green dress embroidered with yellow flowers, and a fichu, and appeared no longer as an unhappy woman breaking down under the strain of a secret too heavy to be borne. There were no more swoons, no more enigmatic pronouncements. She devoted herself to a very detailed story of the murder. It was a narrative modelled very carefully upon that of Bach, but with slight variations. Thus, in the *Rue des Hebdomadiers* she had recognised the unfortunate Yence without a moment's hesitation; again, round that fatal table on which M. Fualdès died, she had seen fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen persons. She was quite oblivious of the sarcastic smile of Latouche, who had measured the small kitchen very carefully, and she said that amongst the persons there she had actually seen Yence and Bessières-Veynac. Without hesitation, without tears, without undue emphasis, she argued with these two prisoners, and repeated over and over again those direful accusations whose mere outline had been sufficient to destroy Bastide and Jausion. This time there were no melodramatic outbursts; the accusation was precise and detailed.

"But," said Bessières-Veynac, "when the witness was confronted with me she failed to identify me."

"At that time I had determined to deny everything," was Clarisse's reply. "Then I was myself accused. I did not take an oath, and in denying everything I was not committing perjury."

Cold, calm, terrible, this remarkable woman adhered to her statements during the whole hearing of the 28th December. Three days afterwards

she appeared again, maintaining the same attitude. "I have no doubt whatever about it," she said in answer to the president of the court.

And when he asked her, "But what makes you so confident?" she answered in a voice which recalled her former outbursts of passion, "It is the power of truth. It is the blood of the ill-fated Fualdès that demands vengeance."

She was listened to with mingled amazement and fear. Either she was the slave to an ill-balanced imagination, or she really believed that she must so behave in order to obtain the pension of a thousand francs and the scholarship for her little son, which King Louis XVIII. had promised her. With the indifferent and cold-blooded cruelty of her kind, she had troubled herself not at all about the lives of a few unfortunates. The angel who had strayed into a house of ill-fame had turned into a hateful vampire. And the grand effects which a little while before would have roused the audience to enthusiasm, fell flat and were received with silence.

To all these grave allegations Pierre Joseph Felix Bessièrès-Veynac opposed the story of his blameless life, set out candidly and without any concealment. Pale and thin, with drawn features and low voice, consumed by shame and sorrow, he nevertheless maintained his impassive calm. Though he passed through every mood, from the gravest anxiety to the greatest hopefulness, yet, in the midst of his troubles, this devout believer had never murmured at the Divine Will, nor wearied earthly judges with his importunities. Except when he was being questioned he kept silent. He bore patiently the troubles which beset him, with the assurance that everything that happened to him

was designed by providence for his good ; and he readily forgave all his enemies.

" If God intends me still to live in this world," he wrote to Abbé Périé, his director, *" my friends will realise, as I do already, that suffering has been a great benefit to me. That hope by itself enables me to bear my chains with gladness, and if sometimes I think that my property and my health may be destroyed, I readily console myself by the thought that what the body loses the soul gains, and however terrible my prison may be, sometimes I even love it. . . ."*

It can be said without exaggeration that the clergy of the Aveyron rose as one man on behalf of Bessières-Veynac. Many priests came to the Assize Court to give evidence as to his piety and blameless character, and their statements were borne out by persons of the highest standing in the various places in which he had lived.

But this evidence would not have been sufficient by itself, and it is even possible that this demonstration by the "clerical party" might have had a very unfortunate effect. So the accused called a large number of witnesses for the defence.

Those called by Constans proved that all the acts alleged against him—private talks with the Bancal woman, arrangements with Bastide and Jausion, etc.—had been invented by some women of bad character, who made no attempt to conceal their hostility to the ex-commissary of police. It was a kind of inverted plot, woven by that wretched class which exposed all its degradation and perfidy.

As regards Jean Joseph Yence and his cousin, their alibis were based on very strong evidence

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and could not be seriously challenged. Nevertheless, a determined effort was made to do so.

So the third trial seemed to present all the features of the first, in such a marked degree that it was almost a caricature. The defence there was stronger, but it was even more violently attacked. The struggle which had been going on for months at the preliminary investigation, developed at the public trial into a pitched battle which lasted three weeks. The court had to decide between two theories which were both strenuously maintained.

When the time for the closing speeches came, the public prosecutor, in emphasising the choice which had to be made between the two theories, expounded a somewhat disturbing doctrine. He pointed out that a distinction should be drawn between the witnesses whose evidence might bring an innocent man to the scaffold, and those whose evidence was intended to secure the acquittal of a guilty friend. He then applied that doctrine to the particular case before the jury, examined the depositions on which the alibis were based, and strove to show that these were necessarily suspect, as they came from servants or friends of the prisoners.

"In short," he said finally, "there is a conspiracy on one side or the other. The jury will decide in their wisdom whether that conspiracy has been formed to destroy innocent men, or to save guilty ones."

It was an admirable opportunity for Maître Boyer of the Alby bar, who appeared on behalf of the two notaries. He accepted the theory of a conspiracy, and it enabled him to draw a striking picture at the end of his speech.

"Who must be accused," he asked, "the

witnesses for the prosecution or the witnesses for the defence? It is to this narrow issue, gentlemen of the jury, that the prosecution has reduced the terrible problem which you have to decide; it is to that issue that I also reduce it. Raise your eyes, gentlemen of the jury, and observe the body of important and reputable persons which in so striking a manner has appeared with me in this court; and observe also the kind of mob which, almost without exception, the prosecution has had so much trouble to drag in its train. On the one side, disinterested witnesses, who are not ordinarily in the company of the accused but who attest, not a passing recognition, but facts which cover a whole day. On the other side, witnesses in whose case fresh revelations mean a new lease of life, or who at least owe to their revelations a prolongation of their guilty existence; witnesses bound together by skilfully devised evidence, who had reason to fear that the slightest hesitation on their part would give rise to an inquiry into their previous perjury—perjury, from the consequences of which they have escaped only for reasons of high policy which no one may examine or criticise, but which founds its claim to gratitude on circumstances which oppose and destroy it.

On the one side are ranged all the classes which we regard as of the best standing in our community, the most reputable inhabitants of the province, like those at whose tables good King Henry IV. delighted to sit, notaries, doctors, advocates, magistrates, soldiers bearing on their breasts the insignia of their gallant deeds, members of that illustrious order which was formerly the bulwark of Christianity, and a group of venerable priests.

On the other side, there appear as the principal

witnesses a number of persons whose characters are recorded in the registers of the prison at Rodez, and to sum it all up in one single example, on the one side there is Mme. Galy, the delight of her husband, the model of her children, the pride of her family, the admiration of her country, the ornament of her sex. And on the other side there is Mme. Manzon !”

Like the other advocates, Maître Boyer made use of somewhat florid rhetoric, but he stated the problem clearly and precisely, and so the jury, having decided to make a choice between the two theories submitted to it, and after three hours' deliberation, returned in respect of all three accused a verdict of “Not Guilty” by a majority of votes.

The verdict was received quietly. Every one was weary of the severity which had been previously displayed. The hostile witnesses, whom the verdict of the jury had discredited, had nothing left to do except to disappear.

As regards Clarisse, it was Paris that held out to her its glittering allurements, for it was there that she believed her notoriety would provide her with means of livelihood, although that notoriety was already on the wane. . . . For a time she was seen behind the desk of a café in the Palais Royal, and later seeking, but in vain, to gain celebrity by writing scandalous articles and by her artificial charms, but the interest in her was short-lived and had ceased long before 1830, when she expired in agonies of remorse.

The two others disappeared into the gloom of penal servitude, as their evidence had served to protect them from the extreme penalty of the law.

Bach was transferred successively from the prison at Toulouse to those at Eysses and at Melun, making continual efforts to gain the compassion of the Fualdès family, causing great trouble to those who were watching him, and finally dying with the secret of his primitive and degenerate mind still unrevealed. The woman Bancal made a last confession, thus stirring up once again the muddy depths of the crime of years gone by.

Imprisoned in the central penitentiary of Cadillac in the Gironde district, she led a life of silent despair. Distracted between threats of divine punishment and her terror of the officers of the law, she turned for help to the curé of the place, who drew up her recantation with a certain circumspection. Some time later, owing to the intervention of the justice of the peace at Cadillac, M. de Bastoulh, the public prosecutor at the tribunal of Toulouse, received the following statement :—

“ The woman Bancal has made a declaration that, during the trial at the Tribunal of Rodez, she consistently adhered to the truth when she declared that she never witnessed the crime, and that she knew nothing at all as to the place where it could have been perpetrated. On her removal to the Assize Court at Alby, she made a statement to the contrary in the hope of saving her life. That, she says, is all she knows about the whole affair. . . . ”

The paper was pigeon-holed, and, all unheeding, the cumbrous machine of the law went on with its work without a break. All that happened was, that a miserable wretch could end her days without the awful dread of being confronted in the next world with the bloodstained shades, not of

M. Fualdès, but of those other unhappy victims who had met with a cruel and undeserved death.

Felix Bessières-Veynac went home again to Rodez. His ordeal seemed to be at an end, since his innocence had been acknowledged. In his mental vision there was still present to him the tribunal at Alby, he could still hear the announcement of the verdict of "Not Guilty" and experience the rush of thankfulness and relief that had swept over him when the president had ordered his discharge. He had been surrounded by his friends and warmly congratulated; it had been the compensation for his misfortunes and almost the vindication of his tortured kinsmen, since his own acquittal was already beginning to make people regret that they had been relentlessly condemned to death.

But now all this first excitement was over, and even his most devoted friends had left him and gone about their own business. His return journey was made in the cold and comfortless month of January, and he received from the ancient town, the scene of the dramatic crime, where he himself had undergone so much suffering, even harsher treatment than from the elements.

With bowed head, his cousin Yence had gone back to his own village, only to be greeted by a thousand evidences of aversion, and he himself felt that he was isolated and kept apart from his fellow-citizens by invisible barriers that he could not cross. It was impossible for him to continue the practice of his profession amongst people who were still as prejudiced and as bitterly hostile as on the day after the murder.

It seemed to him that beneath that gray and leaden-hued winter sky, Rodez was gloomier and

more unfriendly than ever, and that every one felt wronged that he had not been pronounced guilty.

He was not guilty, but owing to the cruel perversity of fate, he had the smirch of guilt, and it was impossible for him to ignore it. In spite of the cold, he went out for a short time in order that he might be seen walking about the streets again; but he did not meet with a single acquaintance. Every one who recognised him hurried out of his way, in order to avoid exchanging greetings with him. It was only from behind windows with curtains slightly lifted, half-opened shutters, doors on the latch, or the glass of shop windows that his movements were spied on. As he walked along every one fled from his sight, and around him there was nothing but an empty void. And yet even the very walls seemed to cast angry, hostile, and disdainful glances at the solitary passer-by.

To add still further to his cruel grief and depression, snow began to fall, and the lawyer hastened his footsteps. He climbed the hill which led to the citadel, and his slight figure made a dark silhouette against the white layer which was thickly covering the earth. And when he had passed, people hidden beneath projecting balconies looked to see if perchance his footsteps had left any crimson stains on the snow.

The lofty mass of the red stone cathedral, lashed by the fury of the storm, loomed up before the eyes of the worn-out man, and the sight of its façade caused his heart to overflow. Like all outcasts and exiles, he felt an assurance that here was a place of sanctuary from which the cruelty of mankind could not succeed in excluding him, a sheltering home where abided the peace so much talked of and so little known. He went close up to the foot

of the bell-tower, on which stood an image of the Virgin stretching out her hands in blessing despite the angry tempest, and flung himself down beneath the great porch like one in utter despair.

With its sombre interior, its dark pillars and Gothic arches, the church exhaled a warm scent which welcomed him on the threshold and seemed to him all the more soothing from contrast with the icy storm outside. With feelings of exaltation he penetrated into the enfolding shadows and hid himself in the arms of his Mother Church. After so much grief and so many struggles, he experienced a great, unexpected and overwhelming joy in steeping himself in oblivion of the past and taking on himself a new spirit.

"Would that I need never more leave this shelter, would that I need never feel again the keen cold of the outside world and the breath of the winter blast, never see again the street pavements nor the hostile passers-by. Would that I could remain near Thee, my Saviour, in the dim religious light of the stained glass, beneath the gleam of wax candles and dimly burning lamps. Would that I could be far from human covetousness and anger, falsehood and cruelty, and ever near to Thee—Thou Who knowest the innermost heart and its most secret thoughts, and Whose watchful eyes separate the tares from the wheat. . . ."

The cathedral was almost empty, only a few shadowy forms flitted to and fro in silence. The sky grew dark with snow, and night fell quickly.

Bessières-Veynac's steps led him along the ambulatory, and he made no pause till he reached the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament at the end of the apse behind the high altar, where a nearly exhausted lamp still flickered feebly. There he fell on his

knees and buried his head in his hands. No longer did he hear the harsh voice of Bach, the hollow utterances of the Bancal woman, or the high-pitched tones of Clarisse Manzon. A great and divine peace took possession of his soul, and for the first time since the beginning of that accursed case he wept bitterly and unrestrainedly like a child.

CHAPTER XV

THE DEATH OF A SAINT

MANY years have elapsed—the time is half a century later. The scene is a far distant one ; we are no longer in the Rouergue, that romantic land of the red soil, but in smiling and prosperous Picardy, with its slate roofs peeping out between the tall trees. The stage setting is no longer a scaffold, with its uneven steps down which blood has often trickled, but we are in a quiet room where an old priest lies at the point of death. From his window he can see the enormous transept of the unfinished cathedral.

Exactly opposite the bed a little altar has been set up on which, underneath a beautiful crucifix, the Virgin of Lourdes, all in white and girt with a blue ribbon, stands with clasped hands between two candelabra borrowed from one of the chapels. The curtains have been drawn. Medicines and flasks are neatly arranged. The whole peaceful aspect of the room gives the impression of a serene awaiting of the messenger of death.

A priest, clad in a surplice and a violet stole, is standing by the bed. He lifts his right hand to trace the sign of the cross and, having pronounced the final words of the last absolution . . . *Vitæ æternæ. Amen*, he steps back a pace or two.

Then one can see lying in bed a fine old man, with his long white hair spread over the pillow, his face of waxen hue and his features already bearing the

imprint of death. This old man is Canon Pierre Joseph Felix Bessières-Veynac, the vicar-general of the diocese of Beauvais, the former superior of the seminaries of Saint Germer, Saint Lucien, and Saint Vincent, revered by the clergy of Picardy, the friend of Louis Veuillot, a father to the poor. He is nearly eighty years of age. Since the Almighty has at last seen fit to bestow the crowning reward on his virtues, it is fitting that candles should be lighted for the administration of the last sacrament.

But there is still a lingering spark of life which burns with a clear flame in his sad eyes. With a sign of his hand the vicar-general recalls his confessor, who was on the point of withdrawing to fetch the Holy Viaticum and summon the friends of the dying man.

"Father, wait a little longer. I must tell you something."

"Is there anything which is still troubling you?"

"No; but in addition to my confession, there is a statement which I should like to place in your hands, in case your testimony may perhaps be sought at some time or other in the future."

His voice was low and gasping, but, in spite of that, quite clear and articulate.

"You are still young, and have probably never heard any account of the mysterious drama in which I was involved in my own youthful days. They always avoided mentioning it in my diocese for fear of causing me unhappiness. . . . Possibly you may have believed that I originally took orders as the result of a crime, which I have striven to expiate in the course of fifty years of a priest's life. Yes . . . In my confession I did not go further back than my ordination. You do not know what my life was before that. Well, I must relate my story

once again before receiving perhaps for the last time my Saviour and my God. I was innocent, father, entirely innocent; and yet if Providence had not miraculously vouchsafed me her protection, I should have died half a century ago on the scaffold."

He ceased to speak, overcome with violent emotion at the thoughts which surged up from the depths of his memory and wiped out the many subsequent years of his priesthood. He heard again distinctly the sound of those voices which had pronounced the accusation against him and shown him on that fatal night, standing by a table bespattered with blood, holding a butcher's knife in his hand. As he struggled to regain his breath, there came back persistently to his mind the verses of the celebrated ballad, which had been sung throughout the whole of France to the tune of a piercing and mournful refrain, and above all he remembered the couplet in which his name had been inserted, for as long as the song endured, side by side with that of Jausion who was guillotined. . . .

Clasping his confessor's hand, he continued:—

"I have always hoped that I should live long enough to do my share in restoring the good name of those unfortunate men who were condemned with less convincing proofs than those adduced against myself. It was this hope that sustained me when I grew discouraged and weary. . . . But the time never arrived. . . . We came into conflict with the most ignorant and most persistent prejudice. . . . All the other actors in that great drama have passed away, and I shall be the last to follow them into the realms of truth. . . . I must leave my testimony behind me, and it is to your hands that I entrust it."

He raised himself with difficulty.

"Look there . . . open my desk . . . My keys are under the bolster. That's right. In the first drawer on the left . . . on the top . . . that large envelope . . . Take it . . . I ask you to read it . . . I beg you to do so. . . ."

The priest had opened the envelope. It contained a paper consisting of a single page and covered with the clear and careful writing which he knew so well. He realised fully the seriousness of these last minutes, and felt himself trembling slightly as by the light of the candles he read these words :—

"During the night of the 19th March, 1817, M. Joseph Bernardin Fualdès was murdered at Rodez. The representatives of justice, misled by a pre-conceived theory, arrested a number of persons who had no knowledge of this crime, and three of them perished on the scaffold. The complete innocence of these people has been proved by the lack of any serious or intelligible motive for such a crime, by the absurd improbability of the means employed in perpetrating it, by the good record of those who were supposed to be the instigators of the plot, and lastly, by the recantation of the chief informers, who declared that they had committed perjury in the Fualdès case."

"One, only of the informers did not recant," added the dying man. "But note carefully that he died without receiving the last sacrament. As regards the others, their attempt at reparation gained no credence, and people even dared to say that the priests, who attended the death-beds of these hapless persons, obtained the statements they desired by means of unworthy trickery. That was calumny, father, mere calumny, against which you will surely protest. Where is there a priest who

would urge a man in the state I am now in, to commit perjury ? ”

This time his righteous anger had been too much for him. He turned pale and fell back exhausted on the pillow damp with sweat. The terrified abbé tried to revive him with smelling-salts and wanted to summon the nurse, but the old man murmured, “ No, no, go on quickly,” and the priest went on rapidly with his reading :—

“ *Who then were the criminals ? Various political associations were accused. . . .* ”

“ Leave that out,” said the dying man.

“ . . . *The freemasons were also suspected. Fualdès was an official of standing in the lodge at Rodez, and when he was promoted to the highest rank of the order, he took the following oath :—‘ If ever I commit perjury, I consent that my throat be cut and my veins opened, that my blood may be dispersed and my remains cast over a precipice.’ That horrible programme seems to have been duly carried out in his case. But it must not be forgotten that under the Restoration, freemasonry had not that inflexible code which it is assuming more and more in these times. Moreover, Fualdès never broke off his association with the masonic order, and his brother freemasons remained faithful to his memory. For several years they held a pious commemoration on the anniversary of his death, and they were present in a body at a funeral mass which was sung in the cathedral for the repose of his soul. It is therefore a matter of good faith with me to exempt them from any complicity in the affair.* ”

“ *How then did M. Fualdès meet with his death ?* ”

What I am about to place on record here is a very serious accusation which has never before been put into words. As, however, I am the only survivor of those concerned in that dreadful tragedy, I must tell all that I know in order to aid those who may still pursue their investigations into the real truth of the matter."

The priest ventured to glance at M. Bessières-Veynac, who remained quite composed.

"Fualdès was a loyal and honest man, well thought of and worthy of public esteem, but his private life was not exempt from fault. It was an open secret among the young lawyers of Aveyron. His unexplained expedition on the 19th March, without his watch or his lantern and carrying a large packet which looked like a bag of money that afterwards was not to be found in his desk, was not for any business purpose. It was for some sort of clandestine appointment, and the unfortunate man, enticed into some evil harlot, must have met with some thieves of a degraded type who murdered him for the sake of his money. Because of the violent political passions that were rife at the time, the troubled state of men's minds and a number of fateful coincidences, that low and sordid crime gave rise to the remarkable and far-reaching prosecutions which are a matter of common knowledge.

"This has always been the opinion held by myself and all my kinsmen. But from the very outset the idea of a political murder was taken up with such conviction that we were never able to get upon the right track afterwards. It has been impossible to hold any counter-inquiry, and up to the present no clue has been found to put us on the trail. The first indications, which have hitherto escaped us, may some day come

to light, and it is essential that their importance should be realised at once.

"Neither Maître Romiguières in his speech for the defence, nor the condemned men themselves in their last statements dared to put into words what I have said. M. Fualdès being dead and crowned with the kind of halo bestowed on a political martyr, no one could venture to formulate this theory without incurring the righteous indignation of every one of his fellow citizens. But now times have changed and I consider it my duty to draw up this painful declaration."

That was all; the dying man waited for a moment, then he opened his eyes again and said:—

"Add another sentence, Father—the last one. . . . My conscience reproaches me for having been so bent on exculpating my uncle and myself, that I had forgotten poor Jausion Veynac, who was denounced less strongly than I and who took my place on the scaffold."

Making a last rally of his ebbing strength he dictated with emphasis:—

"As regards the behaviour of Jausion Veynac on the day after the murder—his hasty entrance into Fualdès' house, the breaking open of his desk, his search in the cupboards . . . I should like to point out before finishing this . . . that if he had committed the crime, he certainly would not have acted thus . . . Jausion did not know that Fualdès had been murdered, and he was astounded at his death. As for Yence, the disappearance of one of his guarantors meant his ruin . . . In a moment of aberration he might have rushed into his friend's house, opened his desk to find out at the earliest opportunity how matters stood . . . possibly to try to extricate himself from difficulties. That

was the cause of his arrest . . . and that was precisely the undeniable proof that he was innocent."

The priest hastily finished writing this down, and Canon Bessières-Veynae ceased speaking.

"I have nothing further to say, Father," he muttered. "You have the entire statement of my earthly affairs and I place it in your care. Now let me think only of God."

He uttered a deep sigh, and his still beautiful eyes, over which the veil of death was stealing, sought the crucifix which shone in the dimly lighted room between the two clusters of candles.

A few moments later, the venerable canon received supreme unction in the presence of several devout believers and numerous priests whom he had trained in the practice of all the virtues. Most of those present were weeping. He himself seemed as if he slept, but his lips were still moving and he followed the prayers for the dying, whose majestic and moving words, delivered with touching sincerity, breathed true consolation.

Suddenly the sound of rustling and whispered words were heard on the staircase and in the corridor, announcing a new arrival. Dignified and sorrowful, the Bishop of Beauvais stood at the door, holding his green-tasselled hat in his hand. He advanced to the bedside. The old priest recognised the bishop, and a tired smile hovered over his wasted features. And while his Grace was giving the dying man a last blessing, they heard him whispering, just as his Uncle Bastide had done fifty years before:—

"In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum."

Then he quietly passed away.

"Gentlemen," said the bishop with deep emotion, "this man who has just gone from us was a very saint of God."

. . . And freed from the shackles of life on earth, M. Bessières-Veynac was at last to learn the difference between the justice of mankind and the justice of heaven.

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